X-MEN ON TV

#58

THE BEHIND-THE-SCENES SCOOP
STRAIGHT FROM
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LARRY HOUSTON
RICK HOBERG

LIVING LETTERER
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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW

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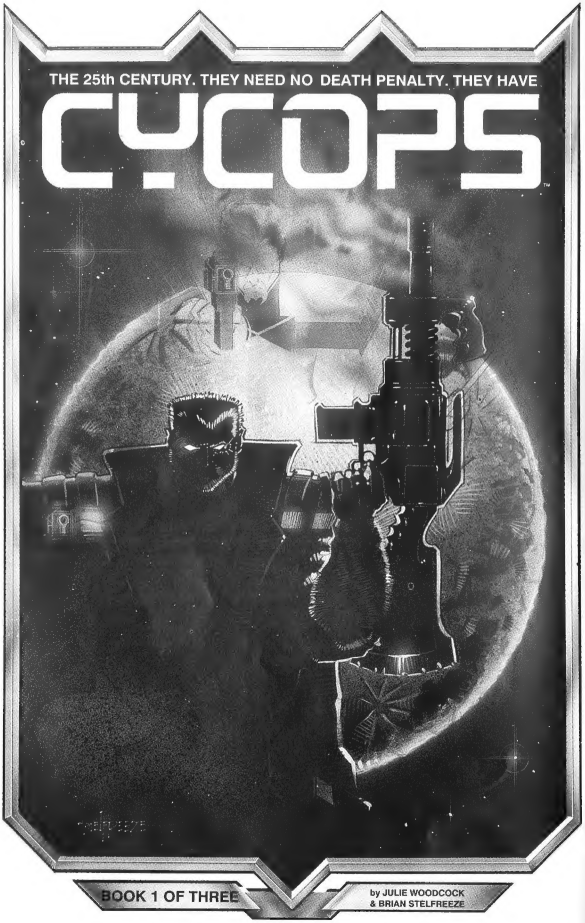
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UP FRONT

One of the hottest topics in the comic book industry over the last several years has been creator's rights. Demands by creators that they be allowed to keep the rights to the characters they create, to get the royalties that can be made from the sale of movie or merchandising rights, etc. As a comic book creator who owns the rights to his characters, it makes sense to assume that I side with these creators.

And I do — up to a point.

My wife Audrey and I created the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS. According to the current thinking by creators, then, we should own all the rights to them. Well, we don't. David Kraft, my publisher, owns a percentage of the Knights and David Willis, my former partner in The Guild (the first publisher of the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS) owns a good percentage of any royalty money we might receive from the sale of movie, television, or merchandising rights. Why do these people, who didn't create the Knights, have these rights? Simply put, the Knights wouldn't exist as a comic book without them.

Consider: The creation of characters and a concept for a comic book does *not* mean a comic book has actually been created. The Southern Knights, as a concept, was not a comic book. The comic book only appeared after David Willis and, later, David Kraft, invested *money* to publish them — and the time and expertise to do all those invisible but essential behind-the-scenes tasks so vital to producing comics. The book would not have existed without them. The book would also not have existed without me. Lately the question has been, who is more important, the creator or the publisher? I believe the answer is neither one.

What is all this leading up to? Well, let's say it's a call for some recognition of the job of publisher. It's not an easy one (I should know, I *did* that job during the first seven issues of the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS) and, lately, it's become a *thankless* job. So how about it, folks? Let's have some recognition of publisher's rights, too!

—Henry Vogel

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"I hate talented newcomers!"–GEORGE PEREZ, after admiring WILLIE PEPPERS' incredibly detailed pencil art.

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"The X-Men show the human race we can live together."

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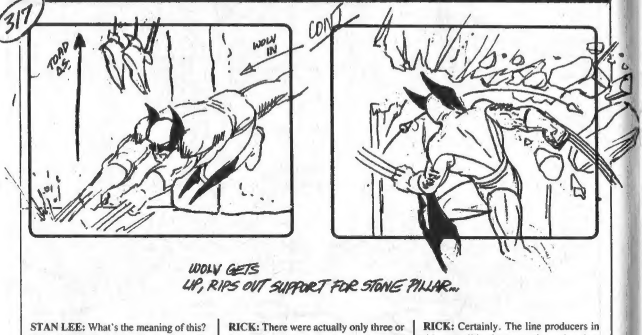
X-MEN ON TV

X-MEN: THE LIVING WEAPONS, a syndicated cartoon pilot by Marvel Productions, stars Cyclops, Nightcrawler, Colossus, Wolverine, Shadowcat, Iceman, the Angel, The Beast and Professor X, among others. The Living Producers include Will Meugniot (that's "Mineo" to you), who was unavailable for interview but who contributed our eye-catching cover, Rick Hoberg and Larry Houston. A protege of Russ Manning, Rick assisted him on TARZAN and STAR WARS (see COMICS INTERVIEW #21). Manning's crisp, clean-lined influence is reflected in Rick's current Hero Comics' title, ETERNITY SMITH. Rick served as assistant on the GODZILLA POWER HOUR cartoon series before coming to Marvel. Larry has been working at Marvel Productions since 1980, where he has storyboarded, written and produced the G. I. JOE series. Supervising producer Stan Lee is . . . oh, do we have to explain everything? Geez. He's only the guy who created half the most popular characters in comic book history, that's all!

Although Will couldn't join in our interview because of a conflicting appointment, Rick, Larry and Stan X-pounded on the X-MEN, the continual criticism of television violence, the wonders of Japanese animation and the ignominious injustices inflicted on a certain Duck who shall not remain nameless . . .

"Man, I thought he was kissin' up . . . I



STAN LEE: What's the meaning of this?

DAN HAGEN: *Let's talk about the X-MEN a bit, but first, Larry and Rick, give me a quick bio and credits, if you would. Stan's legendary, we don't need his.*

RICK HOBERG: We were the first two storyboard men at the studio and we worked on all their original SPIDER-MAN projects and things like that, right up to the X-MEN.

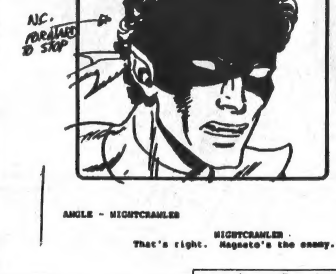
DAN: *You mean the SPIDER-MAN AND HIS AMAZING FRIENDS, that one?*

RICK: There were actually only three or four main artists — the three prime ones in the crew being Larry, myself and **Will Meugniot**. The same guys who ended up producing the X-MEN.

DAN: *There was an X-MEN guest shot on that show, wasn't there, once?*

RICK: Twice.

DAN: *I'm sorry Will couldn't be with us today, but what are the areas of responsibility of the line producers. Could you outline them for me?*



RICK: Certainly. The line producers in this case did a lot more than what they would do, let's say, on a regular syndicated show, because we were allowed the freedom to get directly involved in the writing and plotting of the thing. We went on to do the line producing, such as casting voices for the show, doing all the basic slugging — that is, the timing of the animation — as well as all the storyboards.

DAN: *How do you divide it up?*

RICK: We all kind of have specialities, but we actually divided it right up in thirds as much as we could. I mean, there are certain areas where one guy would jump in over the other, such as **Will Meugniot** ended up editing the film. Larry and I had little or no say in any-of that. But then again, the other two guys were too busy when it came to voice casting, so I ended up doing a lot of the voice casting. That's kind of how it ended up working. I mean, Larry'd pick up one thing, I'd do another thing, but many times we worked in tandem.

LARRY HOUSTON: We kind of worked in the old family method, where we all are cooperative.

DAN: *You say the "family" method?*

LARRY: Uh huh.

RICK: Man, I thought he was kissin' up. I thought he said the "**Stan Lee**" method.

DAN: *Me, too.*

STAN: I was kinda hoping that's what he said. *(Laughter.)*

LARRY: Actually, it was the **Stan Lee** method.

DAN: *I hear this is co-produced in Japan. What does that mean?*

LARRY: It was a co-production between

thought he said the 'Stan Lee' method."

Marvel Production and Toei, whereas we provided all the storyboards and the artwork, all the materials they needed in order to produce the film. They, in turn, gave us back the finished film.

DAN: *I see. What's the cast of characters here and why did you choose the ones you chose?*

LARRY: Actually, it was more due to marketing in New York. We did use all the original X-Men, but we included the Dazzler because they were going to include her in the product line. That's why she was included, in addition to Lockheed the dragon. The bad guys were chosen, again, due to what they were going to market.

RICK: It ended up being the best of all worlds for us, though, because, to tell you the truth, we couldn't deal with the characters as they are today. There's so much back story that **Chris Claremont** is involved in with all these characters that we had to start from an earlier time.

The optimum time, for us, was when Kitty Pryde joins the group. Because when you get a child's point of view on stuff like this, superheroics become more fantastic but, then again, realistic. Because seen from a child's eyes, a hero is always larger than life. We discussed this — doing it like THE RIFLEMAN, where you always saw it from Mark's point of view, his own father being this fabulous hero. It's acceptable when a child has got the point of view.

DAN: *The SHANE syndrome.*

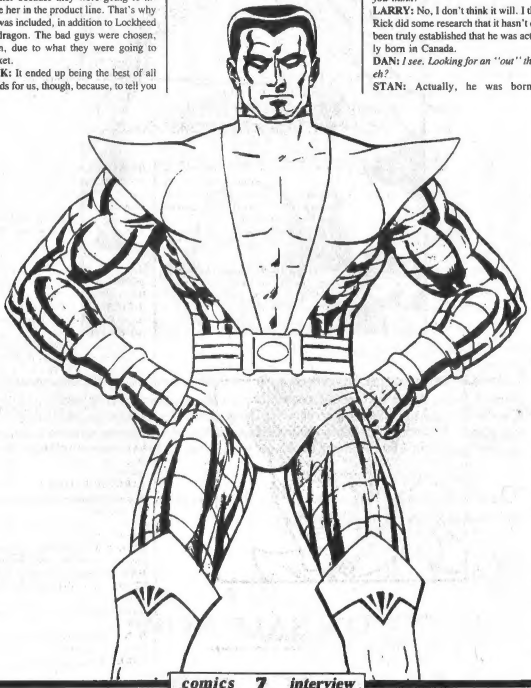
RICK: Exactly.

DAN: *How did WOLVERINE become an Australian, and is that going to piss off our friends north of the border? What do you think?*

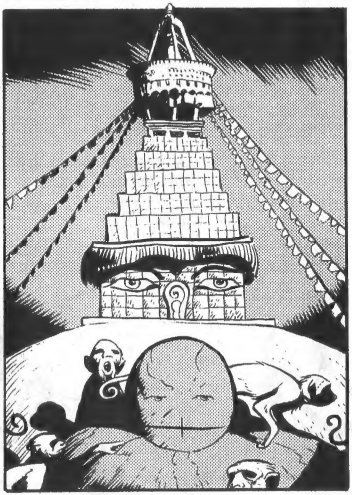
LARRY: No, I don't think it will. I think Rick did some research that it hasn't ever been truly established that he was actually born in Canada.

DAN: *I see. Looking for an "out" there, eh?*

STAN: Actually, he was born in



Welcome to Nepal, Mr. Concrete.



Concrete decides to go on a trek through Nepal, and gets more than he bargained for. With a monomaniacal filmmaker documenting his trip, Concrete (along with Larry and Maureen) journeys into the beautiful strangeness of an alien world that's right here on Earth. But who is Georgi Varna, and his beautiful daughter Marina? And what is in store for Concrete when he starts to build the suspension bridge for the Nepalese government? Find out in this haunting, memorable issue of *Concrete*, based in part on Paul Chadwick's own experiences trekking in Nepal.

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Wolverine "was born in Chillicothe, Ohio."

Chillicothe, Ohio. *(Laughter.)*

RICK: It worried us, also, that he was going to end up sounding like the MacKenzie Brothers. Somebody might try playing with him — if we didn't have control of it — for a little comedy, you know. Because he could be a comedic character — you really could change him for deadly serious to a kind of wacky character, if you're not real careful.

DAN: *What about those claws? Are those going to be a problem?*

RICK: *(Laughter.)* We used them profusely. There are some great scenes in the section Larry produced himself that show him even using it on a human, but he never quite gets the cuts in. But we show how aggressive he can be with it.

DAN: But mostly he used it on inanimate objects and that sort of thing, I take it?

RICK: Pretty much. Robots and that sort of thing.

DAN: *Which leads me into the constraints on doing TV cartoons. I take it they're much greater than doing comics, and what are they?*

RICK: Well, we're loosening them up, that's for sure. I think everybody — even Stan included here — seeing the final film, we all were kind of surprised. It's really good. We've got Marvel Comics to a "t." All you need to do, I think, when you're getting into this medium, is expand on it like Stan and Jack did in the '60s. They expanded on what had come before and made it more realistic and more human. And there's that possibility all the way down the line in animation, just depending on can we get the sponsorship and will people believe in what we're doing.

DAN: *But what about all the psychologists, people like this fellow just north of here at the University of Illinois — Thomas Radecki — who always makes a lot of noise about Action for Children's Television and that kind of thing? Surely they're a pressure in the background, aren't they?*

LARRY: They weren't involved in this, because they pretty much let us have creative reins over the project, and we tried to make it comic book.

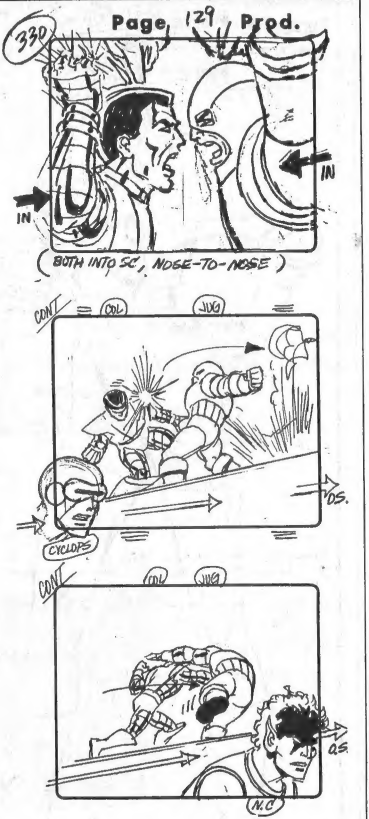
RICK: It's not overly violent, either. I mean, it's got a lot of action in it, but it's not overly violent. I can think of only one fistfight at the end...

STAN: And that was between you and Larry.

RICK: That's right!

STAN: The only guy they have to worry about is me, and they don't worry about me because they outnumber me.

DAN: *I'm glad to hear that's not a problem. Are you talking about an introductory movie here, basically, or...?*



"Stan & Jack ex[illegible]ded on what had come

RICK: One pilot show.

DAN: *And how many shows are scheduled?*

RICK: Stan would have to answer that one. None of us are sure at this point.

STAN: We're hoping, of course, to have 13, which is a regular series. But we're waiting for the word to do the others. Since it's a show for syndication, the first thing you have to do is get all the markets sold. We're rarin' to go.

DAN: *Of course, you're saying there's no real censorship problem here with this. But, Stan, always writing for kids in one way or another throughout your career, has that been a constraint on you or is it something you've just accepted — the potential for criticism, the old days of the Comics Code, all that?*

STAN: No, it never really was. Because, frankly, even though older people read our books, I'm always aware that kids do, too. So I always try to avoid dirty language and sex or anything that's too violent. So naturally, even if there wasn't the Code, I wouldn't do that.

The only problems I ever had with the Code were not the typical ones. I remember one time a million years ago, we were doing a western book. I think it was called KID COLT, OUTLAW. I'm going back about 30 years.

We had a close up of Kid Colt's hand shooting a gun in profile. You know the way you draw that sort of thing. You draw the barrel of the gun, and coming out of the nozzle is a puff of smoke to indicate it's been shot, and then a line indicating the trajectory of the bullet. And that was one out of six panels on the page. And Code Authority sent the page back to us as being rejected — too violent.

So I called them and I said, "What's too violent?" Because the other scenes were just scenes of people on horseback and so forth. And they said, "That shot holding the gun." I said, "What's too violent about it?" Believe or not, they said the puff of smoke was too big! Always eager to preserve the sanctity of the American home, we made the puff of smoke smaller.

DAN: *That's wild. What about the never-ending debate on television violence? Is it harmful to kids? I mean, we all grew up with violent entertainment . . .*

STAN: Obviously, nobody can speak for anybody else. My own opinion is that the whole world is so violent, it reflects what's going on anyway.

It probably would be lovely if there were no violence at all in movies or television or books, but we all know that's an

before, made it more realistic and human."

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impossibility. And we also know that every adult, as a kid, has played cops and robbers and cowboys and Indians. If a kid doesn't have a toy gun to play with, he'll hold his finger out and he'll go, "Bang! Bang!" I think it bothers adults much more than it bothers kids.

RICK: I think it's how you approach it to begin with. I know many of the programs are blatantly violent. But I know Larry and Will and I are just like Stan. We're real conscious of the story and wanting to tell a good story, really, without a lot of violence.

You can do even violent action that is done in a way like the way we handle Juggernaut in the show. He's so ridiculously strong and nothing seems to harm him. Violence around that character, once established, isn't going to make as much impact as, let's say, somebody even slapping Kitty Pryde across the face.

So I think it's how you balance it. I think if it's good, quality stuff, you just have to stand behind your product, and stand up to people who say, "This is garbage because it has violence in it." Because that's not true. There are many classic novels that have much violence in them, but they're still classic.

STAN: You also have to think what do you really mean by the word "violence?" Do any two people really agree on that?

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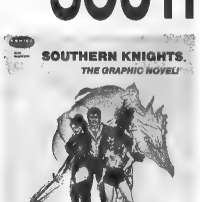

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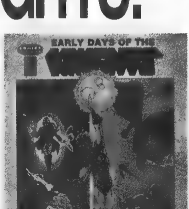

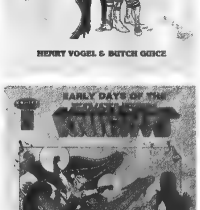

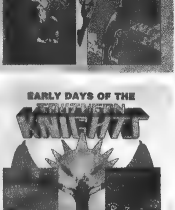

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"I always try to avoid dirty language and sex."

To some people, a fight scene in a comic book or in an animated show, that's violence.

DAN: *Even conflict, it seems, some people define as violence. And that's the essence of drama, really.*

LARRY: You mentioned **Thomas Radecki**. I read one of his reports. To give you an idea of his extremism, he even cited tickling as being a violent act.

STAN: Some people are very violent ticklers

LARRY: When we were doing the G.I. JOE series, on the projects that I had control of, I tried to make sure that there was action in it — stuff that I wouldn't mind my kids seeing. There were some things that I thought, "Hmmm. This could be toned down, if we just figured out another way of showing it." Like what Rick was describing. You get the same impact, but you don't garner all the flak that you would if you did it the wrong way.

DAN: *And — I think Stan was sort of saying this — isn't the deliberate attempt to sanitize life, to bowdlerize it, dangerous in itself?*

RICK: I agree.

DAN: *It's like turning children into automatons, out of touch with reality. I worry about trying to manipulate kids' minds too much.*

STAN: They're too smart. They don't go for it. If you presented life as a Horatio Alger or a Bobbsey Twin world — I guess you don't remember the Bobbsey Twins — kids would laugh at you. It's ridiculous.

DAN: *By the way, will the series play up the mutant alienation theme as a lesson on prejudice, or will you downplay that?*

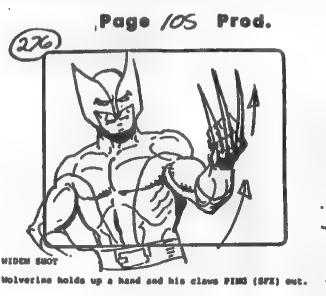
RICK: That's the essence of the show, actually. What we're playing up is — Stan coined a great phrase for us — the "mutant terrorists" are basically what Magneto has gathered around him. That's his Brotherhood, and he's literally a terrorist in the form of a Libyan terrorist or **Moammar Gaddafi** or somebody like that. Just a madman who's out to gather as many of these mutants as he can and use them against the human race. And the X-Men and Professor X are there to try to show the human race we can live together. So that's the format of the show.

DAN: *And what about the human reaction? What will we see of that?*

RICK: They don't like 'em.

STAN: Actually, what we're trying to do is prove that if **Will Meugniot, Larry Houston, Rick Hoberg** and **Stan Lee** can all get along together, there's hope for the whole human race. *(Laughter.)*

RICK: That's the underlying theme, really.

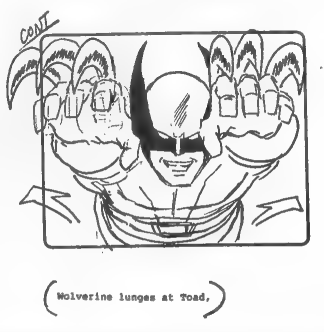


DAN: *Stan, when the X-MEN originally came out back in the '60s, it wasn't one of your most popular titles. Then it was revised and revived and it's now become a fan favorite. What's your explanation of the course of the X-MEN's history?*

STAN: I'll give you my own theory and, again, this isn't mathematics, so I could be wrong. But the guys'll tell you, I'm really never wrong...

RICK: It's true, it's true.

STAN: Comic books are a little bit like movies. You can take an ordinary adventure story, a crime story, and let it star Joe Schmoe and it's going to come out in the theaters and it'll be gone before you turn around. But you take the same story and have it star **Clint Eastwood** or **Charles Bronson** or someone, and suddenly you've got a hit on your hands. I think comic strips are the same way. So much of it depends on who does them.



"What do you really mean by the wor

I believe it was **Kirby** and I who began the X-MEN, and they did very well for those first issues. And then after while there were different artists and different writers and whatever. I used to always say, back at the Bullpen when I was there, I could take any magazine that wasn't selling and make it sell just by changing the artist or the writer or getting a different team. It very often has nothing to do with the book at a certain time.

We found that to be true on a number of books that had been suffering. We just changed artists or changed writers and, bingo, the book would start doing well again.

DAN: *Will you be narrating this, Stan?*
STAN: I narrate everything in sight. I walk into the office, I start narrating.
DAN: *It's a truism these days that good animation is too expensive to be done, but the Marvel stuff — and I'm talking particularly about G.I. JOE — seems to be a vast improvement over that stuff we saw in the '60s and early '70s. Why is that? What's been going on in animation?*
RICK: They had to go overseas, for one thing. Actually, it took some of us coming into the industry — Larry and Will and I being prime among them — and convincing people to start using the Japanese market.

We talked to **Lee Gunther**, who was the head of Marvel Productions at that time. He still is one of the heads, but he was just really running everything at one point, business-wise. And we finally got him to send some shows to Japan, because he had contacts with them. And the quality level started to jump immensely. I really think it was the beginning of a lot of the young guys who were studying animation of a different type, that is, not relying on the old Disney methods — nothing wrong with them, they just don't apply in what we do. There's some very sharp animation happening these days.

SC 1 CONT

'violence'. Do any two people really agree?"

DAN: *Are computers coming into play here?*

LARRY: Not yet.

RICK: Yeah, not for what we're doing yet. I'm sure they will. I'm sure there will come a day when we can actually do a storyboard right into a computer and get a finished film out. I'm not certain that's not too far in the future. It could be right away.

DAN: *Why were the Japanese able to do it more inexpensively? Do their artists work cheaper, or do they just know how to do it better in some way?*

LARRY: Over in Japan, you've got to remember that in comparison to the hours of animation that we have here, they have about three or four times as much animation as the U.S. has. Consequently, they have more people there who are constantly working at improving that craft. And, at the same time, the yen-dollar situation was such that they were cheaper than using American labor. You had the double advantage of being cheaper and you had people to do a volume of work that wasn't available in America at the time.

RICK: It does have to do with techniques though, too. It's still limited animation. It's still in the same vein as the old HUCKLEBERRY HOUND, the old SPACE GHOST, JONNY QUEST stuff. It's a matter of not only good composition, but learning very clever techniques of limited animation. The LUPAN series from Japan stands out as being the best limited animation I've ever seen. It stands up with full animation from **Disney** for my money. It's very clever and really astounding movement.

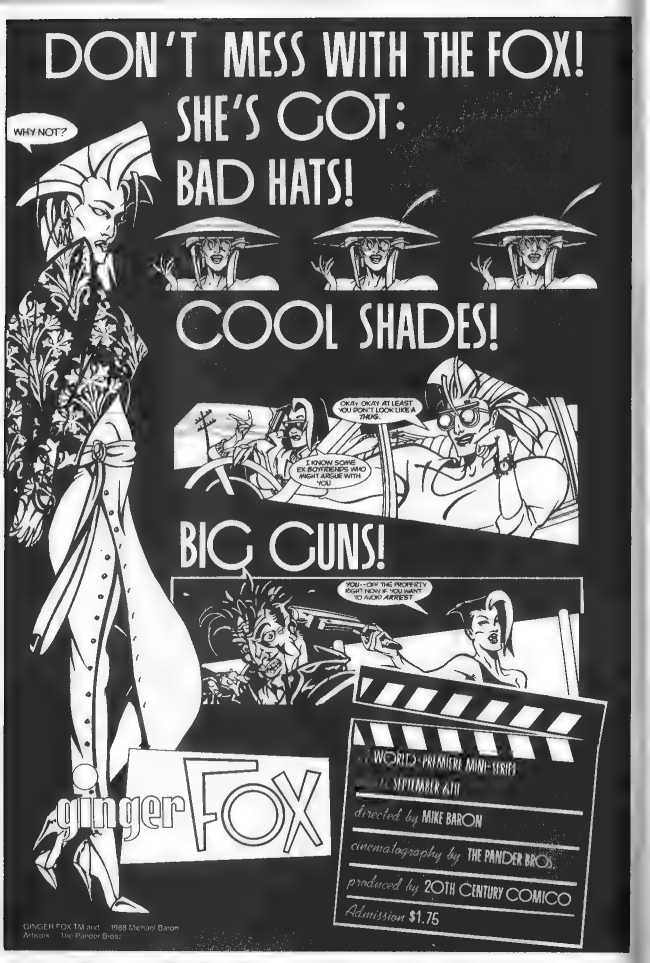
DAN: *Do they use live models to catch the action?*

RICK: Not that often. These guys are working at breakneck pace. They're just great at what they do. There's some rotoscope you'll see once in a while. The titles of JEM has some rotoscope in them, but not much. We don't have the time for that, and it really comes off more artistically if you do it straightaway. It's kind of clunky-looking. It has a nice appeal, but then you get that weird off-drawing. LORD OF THE RINGS comes to mind as a real good example of bad rotoscope all the way through.

DAN: *When may we see this, by the way?*

STAN: You have to earn that. We have to be sure that you're titled and qualified. There are qualifying rounds you have to go through.

DAN: *A couple more quick questions off-topic. Stan, what about the SPIDER-MAN movie?*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SHE'S GOT:
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WHY NOT?
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"Some people are very violent ticklers."

STAN: Well, New World and Cannon are having all sorts of discussions about it right now, the script. We've been looking at it and we're not sure yet whether we think it's quite right or not. I think in another few weeks we'll be able to tell you a little bit more.

DAN: *But it's still a live possibility?*

STAN: Oh, absolutely.

DAN: *Any other movie and TV deals that you can talk about? Anything in the cards for DAREDEVIL?*

STAN: No, not yet. It's just in the discussion stage. But I think probably the first one that will hit the screen, the way it looks now, will be THE PUNISHER.

RICK: And you've got NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD, happening too, don't you?

STAN: That's in the works, too, but as I say, I think THE PUNISHER will be the first. And I think it's probably because it's the easiest one to do. It has less special effects, as you can imagine. I think they can do that a little cheaper and a little faster. They've already got a script. I think they're pretty happy with it. They have a producer and they have a director. My feeling is that will be the first one.

DAN: *Good. Stan, tell me about HOWARD THE DUCK. Didn't you feel that was unfairly razzed, and has that hurt Marvel's media deals?*

STAN: Nothing hurts Marvel.

DAN: *Marvel is invulnerable, yes.*

STAN: We are inviolate.

DAN: *The movie wasn't that bad, was it?*

STAN: I think the problem is if that movie had been a $5,000,000 movie, nobody would have said a word. But expectations were so great. There was the name "George Lucas!" And, of course, much more importantly than that, the name "Marvel Comics!" But they made a serious mistake, I think. They had two movies there. They had a simple little story about a sarcastic, wisecracking duck. . .

DAN: *Out of water.*

STAN: . . . and then the second half of the movie was something totally different, with totally unnecessary special effects.

DAN: *I guess people didn't know what to expect when they went to the movie.*

STAN: It didn't have its own identity, somehow. Unfortunately, I think the sarcasm and the satire just weren't as well done as they should have been with the duck.

DAN: *Let me ask you one of those quirk questions that COMICS INTERVIEW publisher Dave Kraft likes to have asked. Can any of you remember the words to the SPIDER-MAN cartoon theme song?*

LOCKHEED

3-10-87
REV. 3-13-87

STAN: Yeah. *(singing)* "He's. . ." No, wait, that's THE HULK.

RICK: You're talking about. . .?

DAN: *The '60s show.*

STAN: *(singing)* ". . .does whatever a spider can. . ."

DAN: *"Spins a web, any size, catches thieves just like flies." Right. You other two guys, I'm sorry. You got a C on that one.*

RICK: *(Laughter.)* Don't worry about it.

DAN: *I was hoping Stan would be able to remember. By the way, that's out on one of those TV's Greatest Hits albums they sell late at night on cable.*

STAN: Somebody sent me one. I play it all the time.

"The idea is to expand 2000 A.D.

Photo: Steve Cooke. Styling: Nina Gan

STEVE MacMANUS

We met Steve and Alan at Irwin House, new home of 2000 A.D. and the other IPC comics recently acquired by Fleetway Publications, and then stepped out for drinks and dinner to a nearby pub with attached restaurant located on the Embankment near Blackfriars Bridge. Overlooking the Thames and a splendid view of St. Paul's Cathedral — a London landmark that has managed to survive the bomb blitzes of two world wars utterly unscathed — we enjoyed the following dinner conversation about the future plans of Fleetway and the state of British comics...

following the success of this country."

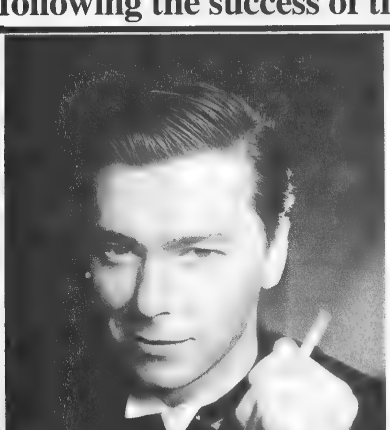


Photo: Steve Cook Styling: Nina Gan

ALAN McKENZIE

(Drinks replenished.)

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *I guess the real question is where do we start, how far back do we go? Alan, you were working at Marvel, you said, for — ?*

ALAN McKENZIE: Six years, until about three years ago.

DAK: *And where did you come from, Steve?*

JULIA MATHER: *His mum.* (Laughter.)

STEVE MacMANUS: I joined 2000 A.D in '76. I was editor for 8½ years, then in March of 1987 I went to America for 12 weeks to investigate the American market, and in my absence **Richard Bur-**

"First, a team-up of Dredd and Batman."

ton became editor — *(points to Alan)* and *he* is now the editor

ALAN: In **Richard Burton's** absence.

DAK: *When you went to the States to study things there, what did you find out?*

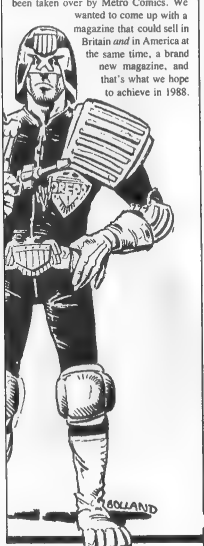
STEVE: I found out that it's pretty much the same as here. Comic conventions are the same, the same *drab* hotels with people queuing up to the bar to get a drink.

ALAN: Drab drinks.

STEVE: Yeah.

DAK: *What did you do during those weeks?*

STEVE: Well, actually, it was kind of a business holiday. I went to the first comics convention of the season at Oakland, California, — "The Wonderful World of Comics," I think it was called. The reason I went over there, the idea is to expand 2000 A.D. following the success of it in this country by selling it in America. At the moment we sell *old* 2000 A.D. stuff through Quality Comics, who have now been taken over by Metro Comics. We wanted to come up with a magazine that could sell in Britain *and* in America at the same time, a brand new magazine, and that's what we hope to achieve in 1988.



DAK: *Black-and-white or color?*

STEVE: Oh, color. It'll be like the DC deluxe format. We also plan to come out with the occasional "Dark Knight" format book, and the first one on the line is a team-up between our character Judge Dredd and a DC character by the name of Batman.

DAK: *I remember Brian Bolland talking about that three years ago.*

STEVE: Well, *then* I think the idea foundered because DC thought Batman was a bigger character than Judge Dredd, but in the years that have passed I think they would agree now that the two characters have equal status and therefore the way the companies divide the profits should be more equitable.

DAK: *One would assume that would have been a straight split.*

STEVE: Yeah. And at the moment DC have said yes to the idea.

DAK: *This book you're launching there and here, have you already got it mapped out?*

STEVE: Yes, we have, yeah. In this country it'll be a fortnightly, — every two weeks, two stories only. In America those two stories will sell as individual titles every month.

DAK: *If Richard Burton became editor in your absence, what happened to you?*

STEVE: Well, the idea is that I have become a kind of group editor and we've made 2000 A.D. into a department, a division, rather like Epic is a division of Marvel, or Piranha is of DC. The whole point behind this is to get *back* the artists and the writers who went to America in the first place, because they were being offered royalties. It's as simple as that.

DAK: *Will this be offering royalties?*

STEVE: Yeah.

DAK: *Is that a first for British comics?*

STEVE: Yeah, as far as I know.

ALAN: I think it is.

DAK: *Would this have been possible when IPC was publishing or is this because Fleetway purchased the title?*

STEVE: I think the fact that we were sold has made it easier . . . the man who owns us now, his name is **Robert Maxwell,** he is more favorably disposed to contributors than IPC were.

JULIA: *Who is Brian Babani and how does he fit into all of this?*

ALAN: Well, **Brian Babani** is —

JULIA: *Has Grand Dreams.*

ALAN: He certainly does have Grand Dreams.

JULIA: *Ah.*

ALAN: Brian parting company with Marvel — I'll choose my words carefully — Brian parting company with Marvel was a large part of the reason why I left, 'cause Brian was a lot of fun to work for. The people who took over after he left weren't a tremendous amount of fun to work for. And Brian, yeah, he runs a company called Grand Dreams, made a lot of money out of the Muppets in his day; and both him and his brother own Rolls Royces so they're doing better than me. *(Laughter.)* They're okay. Brian is a bit of a shark but he's all right. What do you want to know about them?

DAK: *Is he not involved with this Fleetway thing?*

ALAN and STEVE: No!

DAK: *Oh.*

ALAN: Not in the slightest.

STEVE: Heaven forbid. *(Laughter.)*

ALAN: A consummate bullshitter, Brian. His motto was — his motto which he had *above* his desk — was "Bullshit Baffles Brains." *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Well, let's back up a little bit to your days at Marvel.*

ALAN: Oh, yes. You mean the transition

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"Stories cut arbitrarily, made no sense."

from when you guys were chopping up the stories?

DAK: *Right, when we at Marvel were slicing and dicing the stories Stateside and sending them over. Were you with Marvel U.K. right from the start?*

ALAN: No. I worked doing general stuff around the office for Marvel when I was a student. I was a big big comics fan and I managed to get a job in the holidays doing odd jobs around the Marvel offices, in *those* days when the stories were being slicy-diceyed. And then *later* a guy called **Dez Skinn** comes into the story. **Dez Skinn** managed to persuade **Stan Lee** that they could actually make more money if they originated their own stories over here, and if they set up a complete editorial office and slicy-diceyed the stories themselves, and also created new stuff. And when Dez sort of moved in as editorial director — set this whole thing up, this is a great story, this is *very* relevant — he offered me a job; to get it exactly accurate, he offered me a job editing the weekly comics under his guidance. I told him I wasn't tremendously interested in working in weekly comics at that time but I'd be quite happy to take on the film magazine STARBURST, which Marvel were also publishing at the time, which is kind of analogous to STARLOG. And he offered the job of editing the weekly comics to **Richard Burton.** So Richard and I worked together at Marvel, him doing the weeklies and me doing the monthlies, for about six months, and then Richard left and joined IPC where he had a meteoric career rise over the years to end up as editor of 2000 A.D. I salted on at Marvel, doing STARBURST, and then *later* DOCTOR WHO MONTHLY as well, until I left about six years later in the end of 1984.

I operated as a free-lance writer for three years, and later in that three-year period selling material to **Richard Burton** who was working on BATTLE, which is another IPC comic, — it's like a war book. I started selling scripts to Richard then, and Richard moved over to 2000 A.D. and I started selling scripts to him *there.* And then I was having lunch with Richard one day and he was crying into his fried egg and chips that Steve was going away to America for three months and he didn't know how on earth he was going to manage. And I said, "Richard, *I've* got a little bit of editorial experience, you know — I've been around the publishing business a couple of years — why don't you hire me! I'll come in for three months and help you." And he sort of thought about it for five or six seconds and said, "You know, that's *not* such a bad idea " *(Laughter.)* We were old friends and all, we'd been friends since before we'd worked at Marvel, and so that's what happened, and I came in to help out while Steve was away. Steve came back, of course, grimly determined that he would *not* return to 2000 A.D. as the editor, because he'd had seven years of that and was really quite at breaking point with the book — as much as he enjoyed it, you can only do something for so long.

STEVE: Yeah.

ALAN: And so I kind of stayed on by default. That's a nutshell history.

DAK: *Let's go back to Marvel. How close to when Marvel opened its British branch were you there?*

ALAN: How do you mean?

DAK: *Your arrival in relation to when British Marvel started.*

ALAN: British Marvel started in about '71, I think. Previous to that Marvel material *had* been published in weekly episodes by Odhams, which later became part of IPC. What a convoluted history we have here.

JULIA: *And what is I-P-C?* (Laughter.)

STEVE: International Publishing Corporation.

ALAN: British Marvel started up about 1971 or so I became involved with them on sort of a part-time basis, oh, around '74, '75, doing part-time holiday work for them. And then Dez took over the operation in '78, the same year SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE came out.

DAK: *Why do you think the original Marvel weeklies were not successful?*

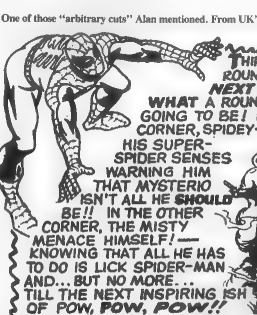
ALAN: They were . . . hm. They were *not* wildly successful. As you know about publishing, you start a title at a certain level and then the sales trickle away as wholesalers cut back on their orders — it's the same thing over here. What would happen was, you'd launch a book at 100,000 copies a week and then when the firm sales came in it would settle at about 60,000 and then run away from there and you would be losing 2,000 or 3,000 copies a week until it would run down to about 20,000, which was the break-even, whereupon you'd merge it and the sales would go *back* up to 60,000 and you'd start the whole process again. We have a great tradition of merging titles in this country; that's the way IPC worked as well, it's a very British tradition. So the Marvel titles would start off being not wildly successful and end up being not successful at all, and they'd do it slightly faster than IPC titles because they had the gross disadvantage of being 20-page stories that were chopped into four parts, so you'd have no natural *climax* at the end of each episode, it would just stop in mid conversation. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *As somebody who used to have to write the bridging splash pages, that is not an easy task.* (Laughter.)

ALAN: So you would understand better than most people, right?

DAK: *The first time I had to do this they handed me a story and said to divide it*

One of those "arbitrary cuts" Alan mentioned. From UK's POW Weekly #30 1967.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"Superheroes. . . not popular with Britons."

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into four parts, and I looked at it and said, "Where?" (Laughter.) *I never understood why we were doing that — I thought that was something the British might require.*

ALAN: No.

DAK: *I think that's what* they *were laboring under, the illusion that that was required.*

ALAN: When Marvel started they — and I'm sure Stan had a hand in this, as well — they sat down with a great big pile of British comics, mostly IPC stuff, and looked through it and went, "Hey, there's four stories in every issue and they run four or five pages long! Why don't we do *our* comics like that so we can sell them in the British market." They never stopped to think, of course, that the stories were specifically *written* for that four-page format so each episode would build to a climax and have a cliff-hanger and then it would pick up the following week. The story was *written* that way. So with the British Marvel weeklies what you had was 20-page stories cut arbitrarily into four parts, which made no sense.

If you think about how American 20-page comic stories are written, sometimes you will start with the end of the story and have a middle section which is a flashback sequence and then finish up with the resolution, which made it *hell* to cut into four parts because episodes two and three would be flashbacks, which would confuse the *hell* out of the readers. That was pretty much a nightmare. The practice was never successful when it was being done in the States, and it wasn't *that* much more successful, to be honest, when we started doing *exactly* the same thing on this side of the Atlantic.

DAK: *You just took over that chore.*

ALAN: Exactly, yes.

DAK: *Just scarfed up my free-lance work.* (Laughter.)

ALAN: That's exactly what happened. Dez managed to persuade Stan that if British people were to do exactly the same job it would be somehow be magically better, which of course it wasn't. Add to that as well, of course, that you would find yourself with something tailored very much to an American cultural audience. . . *(Dinners served.)*

The other problem, I think, was that the stories were written for an American audience, full of cultural references not *all* of which could easily be changed in the speech balloons, and the whole *look* of it was very American.

You know, we couldn't understand *why*, really, that that would have some sort of effect, because we get so many American TV shows here — stuff like HILL STREET BLUES is hugely popular — and the British people are well versed in American culture and American slang and life-styles and everything; but nevertheless we did get quite a lot of mail saying, you know, I don't really understand this, don't really understand that. And add into it the fact that superheroes have never been wildly popular with British audiences. Odhams, who I mentioned earlier who actually were reprinting Marvel stuff before Marvel had their own operation here, they tried a superhero character called Johnny Thunder. Johnny Thunder, that's right, isn't it?

STEVE: I don't know.

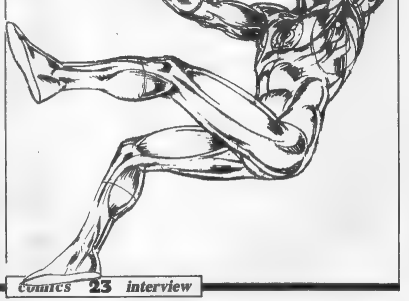
ALAN: It started off as Missing Link, a sort of a Hulk rip-off, and then went on to become a character called Johnny Thunder, which was drawn by an *excellent* Spanish artist called **Luis Bermejo** — do you remember him?

STEVE: *Yeah, he's still around.*

DAK: *Are the Marvel color books now successful?*

ALAN: They are *now*, but see they've got a totally different approach. One, they're not reprinting American superhero material. They tried *desperately* to keep even SPIDER-MAN alive as some sort of flagship title and it just wouldn't sell. It

. . . and across the Atlantic, Green Lantern pencils by Dave Gibbons.



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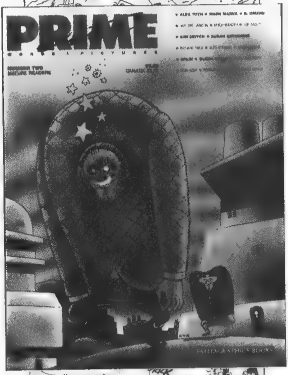

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COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

"When I joined IPC in '71 they were

refuses to sell. They've even put it all in color, cover to cover full color, — it *still* doesn't sell. They tried longer stories. They tried first splitting the American stories into two halves, 11-page segments, and that didn't work. Then they tried running a *whole* SPIDER-MAN story, a whole 20-page story a week, and *that* didn't work either. So they were kind of left with the irresistible conclusion that American superhero stuff just doesn't sell in the British market — whether it's in color, whether it's in black-and-white, whether it's chopped up, whether it's not, whatever. So they turned their attention to making comic books about licensed characters, you know, like Care Bears. TRANSFORMERS has been a big success for them, based on the Japanese toy.

DAK: *How does G.I. JOE do over here?*

ALAN: Very well! In fact, that used to be an IPC license. When Richard was editing BATTLE it was actually BATTLE ACTION FORCE, and Action Force was part of the BATTLE title and I was actually writing stories for that. And then there was a takeover with the toy company, I think they were taken over by Hasbro — I'm not sure, whatever, — the toys were taken over by another company who already had licenses with British Marvel, so they decided to keep all of their eggs in one basket. They took the license away from IPC and gave it to Marvel, whereupon Marvel started to reprint all of the **Larry Hama** stuff. Because it's a toy tie-in it's going very well. It doesn't sell as well as 2000 but it does much, much better than any of Marvel's superhero titles.

DAK: *So Marvel is now selling competitively over here?*

ALAN: Probably three or four times better than the superhero reprint stuff. I'm not really sure about actual figures, but I'm guessing that ACTION FORCE is probably selling somewhere between 60,000 and 80,000 a week. SPIDER-MAN never really settled out at much more than about 24,000 or 25,000 a week, which is a *horrifically* bad sale for a British weekly. And I can say 25,000 with some authority because that's what it was doing when I was working there.

JULIA: *What's 2000 A.D. selling?*

ALAN: 125,000. We have probably the best selling British comic, maybe even selling better than LOOKING. LOOKING used to sell around 320,000 but last I heard it had really tailed away to about 120,000 or so, and *that's* with the advantage of being a television tie-in title with lots of big names like THE A-TEAM, THE BIONIC WOMAN, all this kind of stuff in its day, whatever your flavor of the week is over here. It gets advertised on television and apparently it's not doing very well, the public seems to have reversed on that one, from the gossip I hear around the business.

STEVE: When I joined IPC in '71 they were shutting comics down at 200,000 a week.

DAK: *That's similar to what I hear went on in the U.S. market. Martin Goodman, who was the publisher of Marvel before he sold it, used to cancel around that area, sales that today people would give their eyeteeth to have.*

STEVE: Yeah. Nowadays, through cost-cutting exercises and higher prices, they can keep a comic going at 80,000. Happily 2000's break-even is 60,000, so we're making a lot of money.

DAK: *Why does it have a higher breakeven? Alan mentioned some of the other weeklies had 20,000 breakevens.*

STEVE: Well, you see, Alan was talking about Marvel U.K.

ALAN: Which is reprint material.

DAK: *So they don't have the cost of generating new material.*

ALAN: Exactly.

STEVE: Right. IPC, when I joined, they would spend say 400,000 Pounds launching a comic.

ALAN: Yes. British Marvel, on the other hand . . . in Brian's heyday we had launch budgets of something like 10,000 Pounds, which meant it was really only advertised in the trade journals. It didn't have television advertising, which was terrifically expensive.

DAK: *And now they'll budget how much for a launch?*

STEVE: They wouldn't spend that money now, I'm talking about ten years ago when I joined. Then, you see, you would print 500,000 copies, every *one* of those copies would be sold, pre-sold, so they made a lot of that money *back* on the first issue.

JULIA: *2000 A.D. is selling now for 28p, it retails now for 28p — so that's about 50¢ the way the dollar is at the moment —*

ALAN: Is it?

STEVE: Yeah, not far off.

JULIA: *We exchanged at 1.86 today.*

ALAN: What!

STEVE: Wow! My God.

JULIA: *I know, tell us!* (Laughter.)

ALAN: I just got a check from CRACKED magazine and I got 1.75 about a week ago.

DAK: *In the time that we've been here it's gone up —*

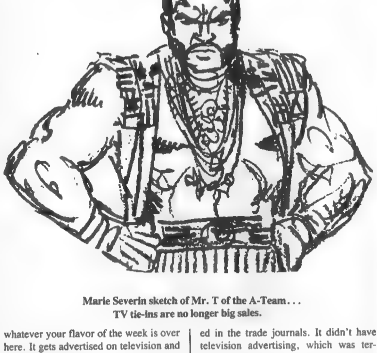
JULIA: *We exchanged it in the States at 1.71, the following day here it was 1.73.*

ALAN: That's bad.

STEVE: For you.

DAK: *That's bad for us, trust me on that one.* (Laughter.)

ALAN: It's good for us when we come over there to see you. *(Laughter.)* Of course, it's bad for me when I get checks from America.



Marie Severin sketch of Mr. T of the A-Team . . . TV tie-ins are no longer big sales.

shutting comics down at 200,000 a week."

JULIA: *In the last week it's gone up from 1.71 to 1.86, which is 15 points! It makes me ill, you know, and we don't really have a choice because if we're going to go around Europe we've got to exchange our bucks. Wonderful! But 28p still is inexpensive for a comic book, I can't think of anything that sells for 50€ in the States.*

DAK: *MARVEL AGE.*

ALAN: But bear in mind the revenue equivalent, 50€ an issue comes to $2.00 a month.

STEVE: Yeah.

ALAN: You see what I mean, in terms of actual financial turnover?

JULIA: *Mind you, that's still four issues that you've got there.*

ALAN: Yeah. And because we've got an anthology title we've got four or five different sets of contributors.

DAK: *Which is that many more phone calls to get the material.*

ALAN: It's hectic, yeah. *(Laughter.)*

STEVE: I'd like to ask you something, Dave. Talking about promotion, how much a company spends in this country -- how much, say, would Epic have spent to promote MARSHAL LAW, or DC to promote WATCHMEN?

DAK: *I don't really know. I don't really see a lot of promotion outside of the direct-sales market. There have been isolated incidents where they have advertised G.I. JOE on TV and so on, but by and large they advertise only in the direct-sales market. They'll put a few thousand dollars into printing a poster and so on, paying the artist, and they'll usually advertise with the BUYER'S GUIDE and with COMICS INTERVIEW and with AMAZING HEROES if they're getting along with them that week.* (Laughter.)

STEVE: How much does it cost to take an advert in COMICS INTERVIEW?

DAK: *Our page-rates now are $125, so basically it's very inexpensive.*

STEVE: What's the cover? *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *PUBLISHERS WEEKLY sells the covers.*

STEVE: Does it!

DAK: *Oh, yeah. When you look at PUBLISHERS WEEKLY that's a paid ad on the front of it. I have an operations manager who suggests things like that all of the time.* (Laughter.) *Anyway, when Marvel or DC promotes a book I don't know whether as part of that budget they also include the cost of sending creators to a convention or so on. Once in awhile they'll send them out on tour, so to speak. But just in terms of basic promotion they'll do a poster, they'll do some press releases, they'll do some advertising. It's not what I would consider to be a significant cost.*

STEVE: I guess that the best ad is a quote from **Alan Moore** on the front cover. *(Laughter.)*

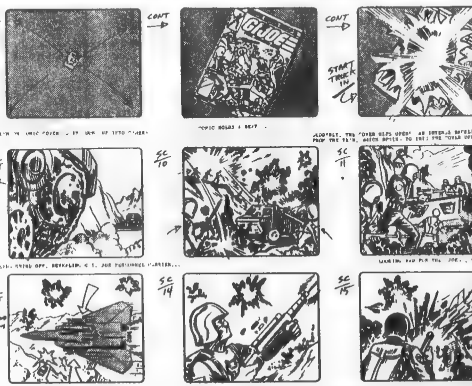
DAK: *That probably doesn't hurt. Basically, I don't see much of an expenditure to launch something, but maybe that's in the process of changing. When you launch a British comic, who are you convincing? Are you trying to sell it to the public or are you trying to sell it to the wholesalers and the retailers?*

STEVE: Well, you say to the wholesale man you are spending *this* amount of money on TV and then he says right, he'll place *x* firm orders.

DAK: *Non-returnable?*

STEVE: Non-returnable. But nowadays we're getting much more of what we call SOR, sale or returned stuff, so if it's going to be SOR there's no point in spen-

G. I. Joe storyboards for a television commercial. Art by Will (D.N.Agents) Meugniot, script by Nelson Shin.



© 1988 MEG, Inc.

"Pat Mills — he's the man who created

ding a huge amount on TV. So nowadays you would be spending the money on convincing the actual reader to buy it, I guess.

JULIA: *And that would be advertising where?*

STEVE: Well, you wouldn't bother with TV because at 25,000 Pounds for a minute or 30 seconds, you're wasting your money. On the new title we've been working on, we've advertised in 2000 heavily and the other comics that Fleetway puts out — although they have a different readership.

JULIA: *And this is the one you'll also be putting out in the States?*

STEVE: Yeah. Today we signed up **Ian Gibson** of HALO JONES and **Pat Mills** of MARSHAL LAW. He's the man, by the way, who *created* 2000 A.D., and the more times that's said the better.

ALAN: And in my opinion the best dressed British writer of comics in the business.

STEVE: Yes, **Pat Mills** is the man. He's your man, he's your main man, along with our other great main man, **John Wagner.**

JULIA: *And what about Alan Moore?*

STEVE: Well, **Alan Moore** is okay.

JULIA: *We think Alan Moore is kind of semi-retired. He's kind of said, "I'm not doing this for anybody anymore, I'm going to just hang out and take it easy." Relax on his royalties.*

ALAN: And why not? You know, Alan's worked very hard for it.

STEVE: He's worked *extremely* hard for it.

ALAN: He deserves everything that he's got.

JULIA: *Who's the artist that did WATCHMEN?*

DAK: *Dave Gibbons.*

ALAN: The **Great Gibbonso**, an old friend. Dave drew DOCTOR WHO for me for quite some time, over **Steve Parkhouse** scripts. Steve is another terrific writer and *also* an extremely talented artist.

DAK: *Well, what's the situation now that Fleetway has taken over the IPC comic-book titles? Have any changes in the comics line been initiated from on top?*

ALAN: No. Other than minor things like changing printers, they moved us from one printer to a printer owned by **Robert Maxwell,** for obvious reasons. *(Laughter.)* Those sort of changes have not really made any difference to us, but there's *certainly* been no editorial directives issued at all. In fact, as far as we are concerned, down there in the lower depths, the workers, we've not noticed anything at all. If anything, I suppose the issuing of the checks has gotten a little bit more efficient, that's about all.

DAK: *Well, who technically did they appoint the publisher?*

ALAN: It would be **John Sanders**, I guess, above us, — the managing director. The staff's still the same now as it was before.

DAK: *So the whole unit just moved intact?*

ALAN: Exactly. There's been no changes of upper management, no changes of middle management, and no changes really of workers. So essentially it's the same company, I think that's safe to say.

STEVE: They cut the staff back, they made a lot of the staff redundant, and then hired them again the next day to come in as free-lancers.

ALAN: I think it's more accurate to say — this should be clarified"— they actually offered a lot of the art staff voluntary redundancies, they didn't actually *make* anybody redundant. They gave them the option, and because of the house and the union agreement — the National Union of Journalists is very strong in British publishing —

STEVE: Yeah, we're big on unions here, what happened to you, America! *(Laughter.)*

ALAN: Because of the union agreement, the house agreement, it was structured so that if you took a redundancy you would get a month's salary for every year you had been with the company — tax free, is that correct?

STEVE: Absolutely.

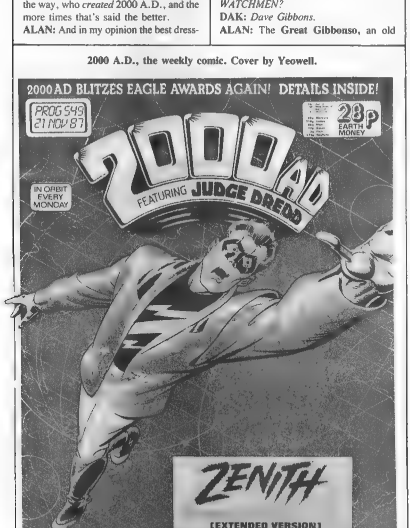
ALAN: See, there's a lot to be said for British unions! *(Laughter.)*

STEVE: They don't have redundancy . . . they don't have the unions at Marvel?

DAK: *Surely, you jest!*

STEVE: But a union is *only* a staff getting together to protect themselves. Is it

2000 A.D., the weekly comic. Cover by Yeowell.



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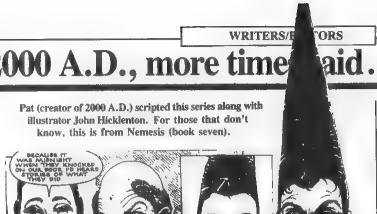
2000 A.D., more time ...aid... the better."

Pat (creator of 2000 A.D.) scripted this series along with illustrator John Hicklenton. For those that don't know, this is from Nemesis (book seven).


BECAUSE IT WAS ALREADY WORN THRU KNOCKED 2M OUR MOB TO HEAD OFFICE TO SEE WHAT THEY DID
WAS DARLIN'
WE AFRAID A FREE LUNCH MIGHT BE DRIC-BATT FRAUD OF STUFF
NO
BUNK AND IF YOU WERE — BUT LET'S NOT GO OFF!

the Mafia, do they stop you doing that?

DAK: (Laughter.) *No. Most of the people work on their own — most of the writers and artists, of course, are not staff, they're free-lance — and when they come in to edit it will be for a period of time, maybe because they want to buy a house or whatever. Nobody looks at that as — at least speaking for the people I know — I don't think they look at that as their career, to be an editor at Marvel Comics. That's just a stage on the way to doing something else.*

STEVE: Ah. I guess here you *do* see it as a career. You start off as a sub-editor and you aim to be a managing director, or certainly a managing editor. The alternative is to go free-lance, which is that you write what you used to edit. You see, in this country, we don't tolerate the kind of shenanigans that go on at Marvel and DC where editors write books as well, 'cause *that's* a ridiculous system.

JULIA: *Why do you feel that?*

ALAN: Yes, having said that, Steve, maybe it's time to tell some home truth here.

STEVE: I haven't finished my comments.

ALAN: Excuse me.

STEVE: It's ridiculous because, to edit a book, you need to apply every minute of the eight hours a day that you are paid to work at. If you're sitting there writing stuff you *can't* edit to the best of your ability. It's a conflict of interest, in America I guess what you'd call an anti-trust suit, because the guy has everything sewn up.

JULIA: *Basically, they're not paid to do their writing while they're editing something else, but write on their own time free-lance because they're not paid to be there editing for 12 hours a day.*

STEVE: And that's the reason why 2000 is the only successful comic in Britain, because we were quite strict about not letting people write their own stuff and also then edit their own stuff. One of the things that that does is stop *new* talent from coming in.

JULIA: *It becomes a cartel?*

STEVE: Yeah. If an editor is allowed to write for his *own* magazine then it's in his interest to discourage new talent, because a new writer will take income away from him. It becomes a cartel, and as I understand that's what happens at Marvel and DC, — the editorial staff take the plum jobs.

ALAN: Is that why **Andy Helfer** writes SHADOW?

STEVE: I don't know. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Hi, Andy.*

ALAN: I'm a big SHADOW fan and I *really* don't like what DC have done with it this time around, so that's entirely personal.

STEVE: So we discourage that on 2000 A.D. I think it's a good rule to have, to divide the two duties. You're either a writer or you're an editor. Having said that, there are exceptions, but by and large it's a bad idea for editors to write.

DAK: *How do the incomes vary? In other words, if you are an editor and you're not writing, how does your income compare to somebody who is writing for you?*

ALAN: Well, as with American comics, it depends entirely on how *much* you are writing.

STEVE: I would say a writer can make double what an editor makes.

DAK: *If he writes enough?*

STEVE: Yeah, and because his tax situation is different. The actual money that he has to spend is maybe three times.

DAK: *That sounds very similar to the States.*

STEVE: *(To Alan.)* What is it?

ALAN: I'm just trying to work it out, actually. I can write a page of comic strip in an hour; I'll sit down at the typewriter and write and the page comes in about an hour. That's not counting the time it takes to think about it, but I generally think about plots and stuff while I'm having a bath or taking a crap or shaving or whatever.

DAK: *That's one of the advantages of being a writer.* (Laughter.)

ALAN: You can do that. And actually working on editorial staff I make about a sixth of that money, but my bank manager likes the regular income.

DAK: *Yeah, they all do. For some strange reason if I take responsibility for you they're happy, but if I take it for myself they're not.*

ALAN: Yes. *(Laughter.)*

STEVE: I'm writing *that* down.

DAK: *What are the page-rates like in comparison, because you mentioned with the project you're launching . . . does this project have a name?*

STEVE: It *doesn't* have a name but it will use the name 2000 A.D. in this country

McKenzie's Bradley. Art: S. Harrison.

1988 IPC

SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #27 Connie investigates her past--Dragon and Serpent explore their future -- and Electrode alone must defend Atlanta from a psychopath with a gun!

By Henry Vogel

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"Epic will take 15%... DC will take 80%."

HE STAYS HIGH UP, WHERE THE AIR IS THIN, TO MAXIMIZE GRUELING SPEED.
FAR BELOW: THE CURSED EARTH IS CLOAKED IN DARKNESS, BROKEN ONLY BY POCKETS OF RADGLOW AND THE OCCASIONAL LIGHTS OF A MUTANT SETTLEMENT.
© 1986 Cal

Found in the pages of Judge Dredd, a continuing character: Chopper (for OZ). Script by Wagner & Grant, art by Edwards.

because 2000 A.D. is equated with quality product in this country. I don't think 2000 A.D. as a trademark means much in America. There we would hope that the names of the creators would sell the books.

DAK: *Well, what are the rates? Since you said this will be the first time rights are offered to the creators, that means the companies were buying all of the rights — so how do your usual rates compare to Marvel or DC when they buy all of the rights?*

STEVE: 2000 A.D. at the moment, under that buying-all-rights system, is currently paying 29.50 Sterling per page for script —

JULIA: *That's just under $60.00*

STEVE: And 96.62 Pounds per page for black-and-white line artwork, that's pencils and inks. We don't tend to split pencils and inks in this country.

JULIA: *That's about $180.00*

STEVE: However, having said that, that price is actually only current until April 1987.

JULIA: *Don't you mean '88?*

STEVE: No, '87. I'll explain. Once the National Union of Journalists' approved increases go through, all of the contributors will be paid back-dated extra to April 1987.

DAK: *And that includes the free-lancers?*

STEVE: That includes the free-lancers.

ALAN: They have their own *branch* of the union and they get what we get. That's the good thing for unions, you see. I'll bet DC don't give an annual pay raise. *(Laughter.)*

STEVE: And back-date it.

ALAN: *And* back-date it.

STEVE: So you can figure on — I don't know, stop me if this is sensitive stuff — but I think we're probably looking at something like a 6% raise. Is that okay to say that?

ALAN: Yeah! *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Actually, that makes your rates really comparable to the U.S. rates, the way the U.S. dollar is going.*

ALAN: That's why so many of 2000's contributors were lured away to American companies and now they're beginning to think about coming back again.

DAK: *Of course, that rate is for all rights, that's their one and only payment and that's the end of it.*

ALAN: Sure.

DAK: *Now, when you initiate the new contract, will they own part of it, how will that work?*

STEVE: Well, I guess the best contract in America is over at Epic at the moment — would you disagree with that?

DAK: *Well, I'm not so sure, because considering Eclipse and Comico and us and others, there are some pretty good contracts out there.*

STEVE: I'll qualify that, the best contract from people other than the independents — by either DC or Marvel *(laughter)* — is what Epic have to offer

DAK: *Yeah, DC hasn't really got anything comparable.*

ALAN: For the record what is that, Steve? I don't actually know what the Epic deal is.

STEVE: Well as far as I understand it the Epic deal lets the contributor retain the copyrights, whereas at DC it's 80/20.

ALAN: In favor of whom?

STEVE: Well, 80% in favor of DC.

ALAN: Really?

STEVE: Yeah.

ALAN: My God.

STEVE: But other than the copyright, I don't think the contracts are that much different, maybe a percentage point here or there on the royalties. But it means that if you work for Epic and if someone buys the film rights, with Epic they will just act as your agent and maybe take 15%. DC will take 80%.

ALAN: My God!

DAK: *I do know that with Epic, or with Marvel, that they sell rights for you overseas exclusive of whatever the agency is. If they have an agent acting over here and that agent charges 15% or 20%, that comes off the top and then they divide 50/50 with the creators, and then the writer and artist would subdivide their portion of it.*

ALAN: Except they don't have any agents over here trying to sell stuff.

DAK: *Well, what I understand is ... do you know Jean-Marc Lofficier?*

ALAN: Oh, very well! Jean-Marc is an old friend, yeah.

DAK: *I was talking to him before coming over, and the French market, apparently the bottom's dropped right out, as the French themselves might say —*

JULIA: *Down the bidet.* (Laughter.)

ALAN: Why is that?

DAK: *I don't exactly know; they were going great guns last year and it just kind of all went down. Jean-Marc said that DC didn't really have an agent in France and that they were calling him to ask the status of the publishing situation and what they might be able to do and so forth. But he said that Marvel had an agent in France and therefore was aware of what was going on and was able to take some steps to try to mitigate what would have been disastrous otherwise. But anyway, if there is an agent, that comes off the top and then they split it down the middle. But there's a difference when you're buying all rights, whether you're Marvel or DC or IPC, the rate you pay is higher than the rate you're going to get from a publisher who is also going to give you some other rights.*

ALAN: Yeah.

DAK: *One of the things that's curious*

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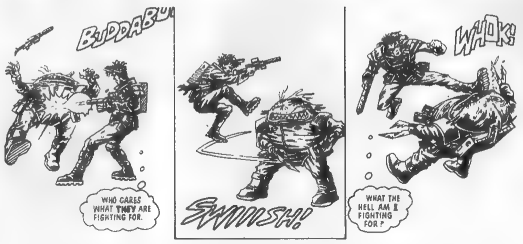

BAD The Bewilderness Company II, by Pete Milligan & Ewins J. McCarthy.

about Epic — and I haven't had a chance to talk to Archie Goodwin or anybody about this — they have done things with the Epic books where they've given fairly substantial page-rates as non-refundable advances against royalties which didn't materialize because the sales weren't that large. So you kind of have a situation where the creator gets a large page-rate and owns the property, and Marvel takes a bath on it. Well, that cannot continue either, because the pendulum has gone the other way and the publisher is out. There has to be some way to get a rate system where the risk is shared.

STEVE: Well, what it all boils down to is that our aim is to treat the creators as human beings who retain their copyright, as Epic and as some independents now do in America now. But we can't do that overnight over here. A year ago, we didn't even return artwork, let alone give royalties, so our first step is to kind of match the DC average contract, which is 7% or 8% on direct-sale and 10% on merchandising and stuff like that.

DAK: *To my way of thinking it's good to create an incentive. What other titles do you publish?*

STEVE: We publish a football comic — that's soccer, not American football — and we publish a kind of a... Well, how would you describe EAGLE?

ALAN: Adventure.

JULIA: *This isn't the old EAGLE-now?*

STEVE: It's using the old name.

ALAN: Yes, but it's nothing like the original photogravure printed EAGLE, which is printed full-color on glossy paper. This is printed litho on sort of standard newsprint.

STEVE: But the bottom line is that 2000 is the only one that makes money, really.

DAK: *So that's where you're building from?*

STEVE: That's where we're building from. We *have* to, otherwise we would just die. So we'll institute royalties.

ALAN: Well, "royalties" is the wrong word.

STEVE: Right, because that implies *ownership.*

DAK: *This is more of an incentive type thing?*

STEVE: "Bonus payments" is what we came up with, "incentive" might even be a better word. But if you would ask us where we would hope to be in five years time, we would hope to be running maybe, I don't know, eight fortnightlies, maybe a weekly — of course 2000 would still be going on — a couple of monthlies.

DAK: *Speaking of comics crashes, as we were a short while ago, is the British market better now than it was ten years ago?*

STEVE: No.

From Nemesis (1987) by Mills and Hicklenton.

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"One of my favorite writers,

ALAN: No, no, it's *changed*. I don't think the potential buying public out there has risen or fallen, but its tastes have changed. If you sort of imagine the buying public as this huge, amorphous *beast* with sort of like one collective intelligence, then what they're buying at the moment is either very good stuff — which I think 2000 is *running* at the moment, it happens to be particularly *strong* at the moment — or it's licensed material. That's what's selling at the moment. But if you want to sell stuff which is not licensed material — which we're doing — it better be damn good or else they're just not going to buy it. That's the state of the British market at the moment.

If you could pin it down to a formula — then we'd all be making a huge amount of money. You *can't* second guess the public, that's the first thing that's really important. What you need is an intuitive grasp of what the potential public are interested in, then you've got a chance at producing commercially successful material. And I just think it happens that people like **Wagner** and **Grant** and **Pat Mills** and more lately **Grant Morrison** do have that kind of intuitive grasp. They are producing stuff that *they* like, and they're having fun doing it, and of course these guys have got a huge amount of talent; that's the closest you're going to get to a formula for commercial success. Or you can take the easy Marvel way out and latch onto a product that the toy company is spending 4 million pounds per month on, you see.

STEVE: And there's a great shame to that. As far as from my experience, comics that are launched off the backs of toys are very poor comics; the fiction's a bore and the artwork's a bore. The fiction's a bore because the scriptwriter is *stuck* with this dumb storyline that was thought up by people who don't know what a story

Bad Company II ad art by McCarthy & Co.

is, the toy people. And no disrespect to any artist who works on a merchandised comic, but generally those comics are passed out to what we call the second division artists. You won't see **Frank Miller** drawing TRANSFORMERS, he has better things to do with his time. So it's a shame that the kid is getting his *first* introduction to sequential art — in our day *our* first introduction was *superb* storytelling and *superb* artwork — and today he gets his TRANSFORMERS and maybe he doesn't think "Wow!" but rather, "Comics are rubbish." And maybe he'll never ever go back to comics. We could be killing off the next generation of readers with this rubbish.

We have a comic over here that we've launched off the back of a toy, too — the comic's called SUPERNATURALS, and the comic's rubbish but the actual TV show is quite good I hear. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Steve Gerber wrote his share of G.I. JOE TV shows, and some of that zaniness has got to get through.*

JULIA: *Mind you it's not HOWARD THE DUCK.*

ALAN: Well, HOWARD was okay, but I actually thought his DEFENDERS and MAN-THING stuff, when he was at his peak — that was brilliant stuff. One of my favorite writers, **Gerber.** What happened, Steve? What are you doing now? *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *I think with HOWARD THE DUCK they made an incredible mistake by not having Steve work on the screenplay.*

ALAN: Oh, what a silly movie! Wasn't it **Huyck** and **Katz** wrote the screenplay? They're capable of better stuff. I think they thought they'd take HOWARD THE DUCK and turn it into a **Spielberg** movie.

DAK: *To me it was more like a Roger Moore JAMES BOND movie. All of those interminable chases, it was really boring.*

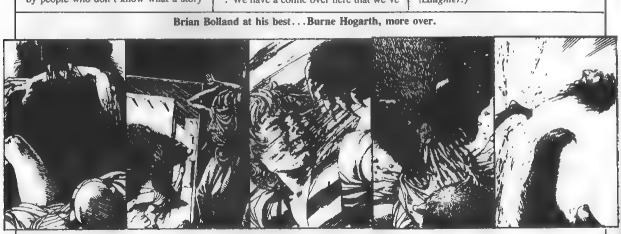
ALAN: And why do the duck as a midget in a duck costume, which it patently was, when they could do great stuff in the other direction with animation?

STEVE: If you want to talk about Hollywood, Alan is the world's greatest film expert. *(Laughter.)* He would be able to answer this question for me, 'cause I think it's quite interesting. I know that at one time Hollywood was using **Fitzgerald** and **Hemingway** and so on as screenplay writers, so —

ALAN: I had a brief brush with Hollywood, I suppose, when **Steve Dillon** and I worked on the storyboards to SUPERGIRL — here's a great untold story —

STEVE: Oh, let's have a little more wine. *(Laughter.)*

Brian Bolland at his best... Burne Hogarth, more over.



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Gerber. What happened, Steve?''

ALAN: Now, **Steve Dillon**'s a terrific artist, an *extremely* talented artist. And basically what we found was that the movie industry isn't tremendously interested in either talent or new ideas. What they *are* extremely interested in is old ideas dressed up to look new.

STEVE: But my point was that at some stage they *were* interested in quality. What changed that?

ALAN: No, Steve, they weren't really. You're right, they did have people, for example, like **Raymond Chandler** and **William Faulkner** writing screenplays, but this was very much the minority of the product. What they did was they'd hire these guys to put together these prestige movies, which didn't make any more money than having Joe Schmoe write the script, and what it did was it allowed the producer to swagger around bragging he had **F. Scott Fitzgerald** writing his movie. It was so **Louie B. Mayer** could list these totally awesome talents as having worked for him. It was an ego thing, really.

DAK: *Well, what about the SUPERGIRL thing?*

ALAN: Oh, no, I don't really want to tell you that story.

STEVE: Oh, go on. I'm sure the readers are dying to hear it.

ALAN: Well, really, what it was — in the brief time we were associated with the **Salkinds** and their motley crew of no-talents — it was sort of like everybody were friends. **David Odell** was the script-writer, and his previous claim to fame was the script to DARK CRYSTAL, which was another horrific travesty. *(Laughter.)* Some of the best things in SUPERGIRL were the stuff that *we* did.

STEVE: Really?

ALAN: Yeah. We actually storyboarded the opening 15 minutes or something, which was all of the stuff on Argo City, Supergirl's hometown, and snatches of it did make it into the finished movie. Basically, we turned out around 250 frames of storyboard in a week just to prove that we could do it, which we were paid a huge amount of money for. But we just were told horrific lies, and *generally* we found that they spent most of their time dodging us. If we had to ring them up to ask about something, everybody was out to lunch and nobody would ever phone you back to answer your questions. So it was just generally a very amateur show. I mean no wonder it cost $20 million to produce 1½ hours of drek, really, because it was just so badly run. In the end we kind of like got fed up with ringing them up and asking them for stuff and we just sort of decided to drop all contact with them and wait for them to ring us, and they never did.

STEVE: How did they get in contact with you in the first place?

ALAN: It was **Steve Dillon**'s idea. He was saying, ''Hey, **Mike Ploog** is making a damn fortune doing storyboards, why don't *we* do that.'' And I said, ''Yeah, that's not a bad idea, Steve.'' So I kept my eye open for a couple of weeks on what big productions were going to start business here on this side of the Atlantic, and the first one that was announced was SUPERGIRL. So I rang up and got on to the producer, got straight

The spirit of The Judge's Xmas. Steve Dillon's signature is stranger than his art.

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A COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

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"It was not a pleasant experience."

through to him with no trouble at all, actually, and said we were a bunch of designers and would like to come down and see him and show him some of our stuff, and he said to wait until the art director came on line on Monday and come and see him, and so we did that. That was basically how it started, it was just a phone call — and I recommend anybody else who wants to try it to do *exactly* the same thing. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *The secrets of breaking into the movies.*

ALAN: That's right, that's right, you ring up the producer and ask if you can come and show your stuff.

DAK: *This one thing is worth the price of this issue of COMICS INTERVIEW.*

ALAN: Yes, cover line, how to get onto SUPERGIRL.

STEVE: How to get onto SUPERGIRL sounds a bit rude, doesn't it. *(Laughter.)*

ALAN: Having said that, though, it is apparent to me that, if you're going to get into movies you are first attracted by the fact that like the advertising business, they pay five times the rate that comic books do; what they don't tell you is that you have to do ten times the work. I've had the experience of being involved in producing advertising material for ZOIDS, which is a toy tie-in, which paid a great rate — it paid something like double the scripting rate.

In an advertising job you write the script — I've also been editor on these advertising jobs, as well — having written the script you have to have it approved by the advertising agency, and this is *after* the managing director of the toy company's wife has read it as well to make sure she likes it and then, having gotten your script approved by everybody including the janitor, you then give it to the artist to pencil up, and the artist pencils the script up and you take the pencils in to the advertising agency to have them approve the pencils — 'cause every stage *has* to be approved — and the advertising agency looks at the pencils and goes, "Gee, couldn't we have this guy doing something else?" And you say, "Well, why didn't you say something about that in the script?" I was paid to go sit in on meetings, because *having* a meeting with these people is a lot like washing a handkerchief by hand.

STEVE: Describe that. No, don't, I'm having desert. *(Laughter.)*

ALAN: I don't think I need to, really. It was not a pleasant experience.

Mike Ploog makes the big time... with one of many storyboard jobs, this one for Carpenter's remake/sequal of Howard Hawks' The Thing.

5 THE TORSO OPENS
6 DOG PULLS BACK HIS ARMS BITTEN OFF
7 THE THING EXPLODES OUT OF NORRIS —
8 CORPSE THROWS IT'S HEAD FROM SIDE TO SIDE MAKING IT'S WAY TO THE END OF THE TABLE

© 1988 Universal Illimitable Ploog

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"I guess I've been a wanderer, too. I've

JERRY ROBINSON

In Parts One and Two, Jerry told the real story of the creation of The Joker, what he felt about DC's 1960s revamp of Batman, and Bob Kane's lovelife. Here, in Part Three, the final chapter of this in-depth interview with one of comics' great pioneers, we get to hear about young Steve Ditko, Stan Lee, and Jerry's ambivalence toward fame and fortune.

STEVE RINGGENBERG: *Now that you mention it, you were talking about science fiction strips.*

JERRY ROBINSON: Yeah. There were a number of others in the field at that time and, as you know, themes in newspaper strips tend to be cyclical — which I tried to document in my book. Historically, it seemed to be a very good time for science fiction. There was a resurgence from the early FLASH GORDON period in the Fifties. But about three or four other strips were launched and the market became saturated. Some, unfortunately, were not done very well and failed.

When a strip dies in the comics it gets around . . . editors think "Oh, readers are no longer interested . . . science fiction is out," and so forth. So while we had a good solid list, and I think we were doing one of the better ones, it began to look like JET SCOTT was not going to go much further because of that. The irony I mentioned occurred within weeks of the time we ended the strip: The Russians launched Sputnik. Science became the "in" thing. America was in a near panic. Suddenly, we were behind the Russians, technologically.

We would have been perfectly situated with the concept of JET SCOTT. It was really the new innovations in technology, the cutting edge of real science, that was our specific area of science fiction. And we just ended it. We lost space in a hundred papers. It was a perfect example of, at times, the overriding importance of timing.

STEVE: *How did it feel?*

JERRY: Oh, terrible, because I'm still convinced that if we hadn't cancelled, it had the potential to be a top strip — perhaps even to this day. In retrospect, however, I'm glad — really, I am. At the time, I felt terrible. I thought, "Oh God, we would've had five hundred papers in

JET SCOTT
CAUGHT BY JET AT THE ROCKET LAUNCHING STATION- GREGG ADKINS TRYING TO DELAY SALES SHIPMENT SO HE COULD COLLECT FORFEIT MONEY!
GORDON PEEK JERRY ROBINSON
I'M TAKING A COUPLE OF GREGG'S ROCKETS BACK TO WASHINGTON WITH ME—
I KNOW A FEW PENTAGON CHARACTERS WHO'LL WANT TO STUDY THEM!
EXPECT TO STAY IN GOOSE BAY LONG, GALS?
THE SKIPPER SAYS HELL HAVE MY CARGO UNLOADED IN A DAY OR SO!
AFTER THAT- I'LL RETURN STATESIDE FOR FRESH CARGO-
LIKE TO TAKE THE ICE QUEEN BACK TO SEATTLE WITH US?
FOOLISH QUESTION-
TELEGRAM FOR JET SCOTT!
I KNEW MY LUCK WOULDN'T HOLD OUT!

©1964 New York Herald Tribune Inc.

wanted success, yet feared it, always."

no time". But I hate the thought that I would have been doing it all those years since, which I would've, if it had been that successful.

I always saw that as a pitfall in a comic strip. At one time you want to make a success at it, and at the same time it's a dead end, artistically. And I guess I've been a wanderer, too. I've wanted it, yet feared it, always. You know, when I get too successful at something I want to do something else, because I never seem to be satisfied in doing just one thing. I never had the desire to just create a strip and then treat it as a business — you know, have somebody else execute it with my name on it as the artist. So I'm very ambivalent about that kind of thing, though I guess like anybody else, if it left me with a million dollar strip it would be a hard decision to make. Fortunately, I never had to make that choice.

In retrospect, I am glad because I have done so many different things since that I have really enjoyed doing. Because once you create an adventure strip, it is all-consuming. But you know you have to . . . part of the force of any strip is to keep it identifiable and you can't diverge much from the initial concept. So it's like doing a theme with endless variations and almost after the first year or two the real creativity is over.

STEVE: *Did you have to do a lot of research on the technological aspects?*

JERRY: A lot of research, although much of it was made up to appear authentic. I like some of the visuals when I look back on them. Usually you look back on stuff you did a year ago, or two years, let alone twenty years ago, with great pain. I had the occasion to look back on some JET SCOTT not long ago and I'm rather surprised. A lot of it still looked good. I even . . . take a page or two to my class now and then to show some examples of storytelling that I was pleased with.

STEVE: *How good were you at anticipating technological advances?*

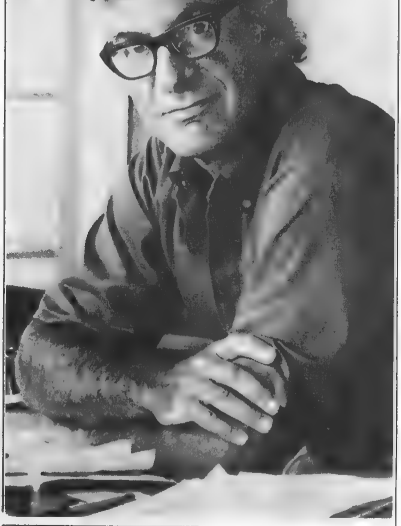
JERRY: Oh, we did very well. And that's what Starke did best as a science trained writer. That part of it was solid, and I was excited about the drawing. For a newspaper strip, I think I did more than the usual amount of experimentation because that's what I liked to do, and it didn't seem to hurt the strip. We never lost any papers over it, about keeping a strict visual identity. Each episode would be six, eight weeks in length and I would handle each story differently in concept and with the technique that I felt the story demanded. Some with a little more humour than others, I would handle more stylistically. Some were straight dramatic adventure — set on the high seas for example — I might do that sequence in Craftint. So it did change its visual look from time to time, but it kept my own interest from flagging by experimenting with the interpretation and techniques.

STEVE: *Following JET SCOTT, what did you go on to?*

JERRY: Well, I think after that, the last thing I did really in the comics was with **Stan Lee** while I was teaching at Visual Arts during the 1950s. I would do some advertising and illustration, but most of the rest of the comic book period was during that time. I found teaching very satisfying. It gave me a chance to study myself and analyze what I learned by trial and error. Some of my students went on to become well known in the field.

STEVE: *Can you name some names?*

JERRY: **Steve Ditko** was a student of mine for about two or three years. Part of the concept of Visual Arts was that the faculty were professional artists working in their field and devoting a certain amount of time to teaching. The classes were large . . . thirty to forty students, and I



"The last thing I really did in com-

TROUBLE ?
THEY DON'T SAY! BUT THE WIRE SAYS: TAKE FASTEST WAY BACK TO WASHINGTON!
IN WASHINGTON- A STRANGE SERIES OF EVENTS BEGINS--
I DON'T GET IT, BLAKE! YOU GO TO THE AIRPORT'S SURE ISN'T DUE FOR THREE HOURS!
I CAN'T EXPLAIN IT- BUT I JUST HAD THE FUNNIEST FEELING SHE'S COMING IN ON AN EARLIER PLANE!
SEARCH STORY: JERRY ROBINSON

don't know how I kept the schedule, but in those days I was pretty young. But I would teach four and five evenings a week for four hours after doing my comic book work all day.

STEVE: *That's a tough schedule.*

JERRY: Now I teach only two hours a week at the New School, so you can see the difference the years can make! Yeah, it was tough, but it was exciting and I really devoted myself to it. I think I was a fairly good teacher — at least I get a lot of good feedback from former students. Many keep in touch, send me their work. Anyway, in addition to **Steve Ditko**, there was **Abel**. . .

STEVE: *Jack Abel?*

JERRY: Jack Abel.

STEVE: *He was interviewed in COMICS INTERVIEW #7. I did that one. I think that was the first one he ever had published. Jack's a nice man.*

JERRY: Oh yeah, very fine. All these kids just coming here to New York for the first time also **Dick Hodgins**, a very talented artist who later became editorial cartoonist for the NEW YORK NEWS and now he works on a lot of syndicated strips. One was **Half Hitch**, written by **Hank Ketchum**, for a couple of years. It didn't survive, but Dick did a very good job. He has worked for **Dik Browne** on HI AND LOIS and a number of theirs. He's very versatile.

STEVE: *He's got a very plastic style. He can do anything.*

JERRY: Yes, exactly. And **Mort Gerberg**, the fine NEW YORKER cartoonist. Also **John Langton**, who became art director for the NEW YORK POST. In fact, John was my assistant for a number of years, as were several other students. I'd hire them when they graduated and achieved a level of proficiency. Some became associates or partners on a number of projects. Langton was. Another talented young fellow who is top staff artist at THE DAILY NEWS, **Bill Robinson**, no relation, was a student of mine also. **Bob Forgione** who later did a lot of work in the comics. . . THE THING, among others.

STEVE: *I'm not familiar with that name. I've probably seen his stuff, though.*

JERRY: Probably. He's been out of the comics for a long time now.

STEVE: *Yeah, and for many years a lot of people didn't sign their names to anything.*

JERRY: Yeah, a lot of stuff Bob didn't sign. Terrific artist. Bob was a student for several years and really worked with great intensity and dedication. After assisting for a number of years we formed an association, a partnership, and we did a lot of books together. For a good part of the period when I was working for **Stan Lee** and later, on BAT MASTERSON and LASSIE. Bob was my assistant or partner. We also did a lot of the advertising and book illustration before he decided to go into television. Bob's great flair and

JET SCOTT
WILL EARTH A MYSTERIOUS SPACE STATION AS THE ICE QUEEN APPROACHES- STONE SAY— AND A LITTLE WHILE LATER—
SEARCH STORY: JERRY ROBINSON
DREGG TO WILK/ GEDDS TO WILK/ FOB ROCKET IS NOW IN FLIGHT—
YOU SHOULD ENTER FOB—WILL IN 15 MINUTES/ CUT/ AND CUT!
AS THE FOB-ROCKET CROSSES THE PATH OF THE ICE QUEEN—
LOOKING FOR CLOUDS, SCOTT? YOU WON'T FIND 'EM— THIS IS THE CLEAREST DAY IN MY LOG BOOK!
BETTER RE-WRITE IT CAPTAIN—
-THERE GOES THE GUN!
FOB! QUICKEST FALL OF ALICK I'VE EVER SEEN!
-AND THE THICKEST! WE'RE SAILING BLIND!
KILL THE ENGINE!
HERE'S MAY MEET PARADISE- TEN MILS RIGHT IN DEAD AHEAD!
THIS IS THE SPOT WHERE THE LAST FOUR BOATS WENT DOWN!
SEARCH STORY: JERRY ROBINSON

©1954 New York Herald Tribune Inc

ics was with Stan Lee in the 1950s."

ability made him an instant success in TV. Bob really learned storytelling, I think in the comic books, as I did. They never saw anybody visualize storyboards like he did...the kind of thing he did every day in the comics. Well, Bob became vice-president of William Esty, one of the major advertising agencies. He's now a film producer with his own film company. Like the old saying, "bread cast upon the waters"...well, once in a while he'd call me to do a job for him. I designed some ads for him including a series for Doral cigarettes, one of his accounts.

STEVE: *You're still doing ad work now aren't you, occasionally?*

JERRY: Very occasionally. I really don't have that much time...I don't like advertising, generally, but it's so lucrative. Once in a while, I'll do a job that will pay for a summer, you know...but I really don't find it too creative.

STEVE: *Neal Adams has his own studio and they do a lot of storyboard-type of work. I've seen some of the storyboards that Adams does and they're great.*

JERRY: Sure. He's terrific. Of course, Bob is an idea man and a creator and he's got great flair...but, I think anybody who had good basic training in the comics could be successful in television. Mort **Meskin** met with the same success with TV storyboards. His visuals were brilliant.

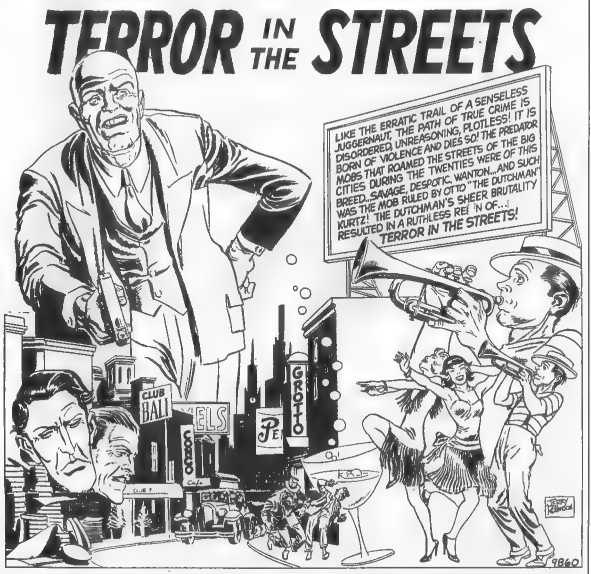
STEVE: *Jerry, you wrote your own history of the comic strips and I was just wondering if you have a philosophy that you've evolved about comics as a communications medium, something that's maybe developed out of your teaching.*

JERRY: Well, what do you mean? My philosophy about the comics?

STEVE: *Yeah, just about what makes comics unique as an entertainment medium.*

JERRY: I guess that's what I tried to write in a three-hundred page book! That's a big question...a good question, but —

Opening page of one of the many crime stories Jerry drew for Marvel in the '50s.


TERROR IN THE STREETS
LIKE THE ERRATIC TRAIL OF A SENSELESS JUGGERNAUT, THE PATH OF TRUE CRIME IS DISORDERED, UNREASONING, PLOTLESS! IT IS BORN OF VIOLENCE AND DIES SO! THE PREDATOR MOBS THAT ROAMED THE STREETS OF THE BIG CITIES DURING THE TWENTIES WERE OF THIS BREED...SAVAGE, DESPOTIC, WANTON...AND SUCH WAS THE MOB RULED BY OTTO "THE DUTCHMAN" KURTZ! THE DUTCHMAN'S SHEER BRUTALITY RESULTED IN A RUTHLESS REI 'N OF...
TERROR IN THE STREETS!
CLUB
BALL
GRETCHO
1860

1958 M.E.G.

"I don't like advertising, but it's so

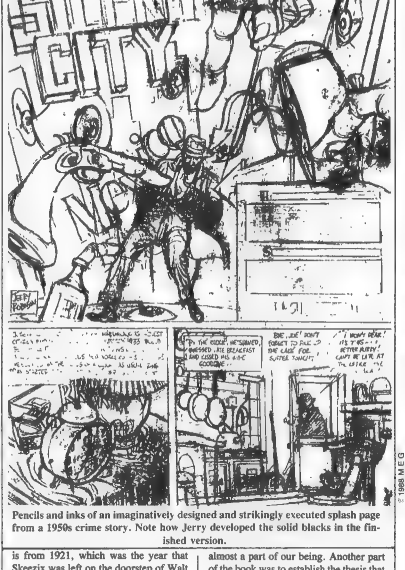
STEVE: *Well, if you could distill it down to about five minutes.*

JERRY: Well, I will try to answer it in part. There's a lot to that question because comics are unique. It took centuries to develop, but the modern comic strip happened almost accidentally. There were economic, sociological, technological reasons why it came about at the time it did. Although in retrospect, it seems inevitable. It came about coincidentally, almost at the same time as the development of the film and animation. There seemed to be a striving for movement in art, in giving an illusion of movement on a flat canvas, so that was part of it. The development of the sequential narrative was another step in its evolution.

One force of the medium that is perhaps not fully appreciated is the manipulation of time that you can create with the comics, maybe even more so than film in some ways. You can expand it or compress it. The strip engages the reader's imagination — this is also a part of its impact. You can tap into the reader's mind when it's done well. And once you begin to add dialogue, it gives a sense of a story unfolding before you. There are other technical reasons that give the genre its unique power. The development of character, of course, is an essential part. It's a living art form in the sense that, particularly in the comic strip, the characters in the strip are in constant change and growth and interaction with the reader over an extended period of time. The novel or a movie does not have it…even if you have a character in a series. The television serial is closest…I think that's the heart of the power of the soap opera and sit com.

STEVE: *Also that cumulative effect of past history behind the characters.*

JERRY: Exactly. That's part of what I mean by the growth, day by day. And after all, in a humor strip, you're dealing with nine or ten seconds. If you think of the reader reading a story where every three sentences they have to stop and wait for the next day to read, how do you maintain that interest? It must have a unique power in order to do that. It's what I mean by a living thing…the artist and the characters and the reader are growing and changing at the same time, under much the same or even different circumstances. The story is not set in concrete as in a play or movie or novel — the form allows for a constant change that reflects the growth in the writer and/or artist and the reader. In fact, the characters in Gasoline Alley aged at the same rate as the audience…That particular page, you know,


THE SHEIK CITY NEWS
BY JERRY ROBINSON
BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE ARCHIBALD LEE BRIARTART AND CLOSED HIS 6-DAY CONCERT
BUT...BUT I DON'T WANT TO FACE UP THE LAST FOR... SLITHER TAINTLY!
I WON'T HEAR IT! IT'S HIS BETTER NATURE! CAN'T BE LATE AT THE OFFICE!
© 1988 MEG

Pencils and inks of an imaginatively designed and strikingly executed splash page from a 1950s crime story. Note how Jerry developed the solid blacks in the finished version.

is from 1921, which was the year that Skeezix was left on the doorstep of Walt Wallet *(points to the rear wall of the room where the interview is taking place, which is covered with framed comic pages and cartoons.)* That's the Thanksgiving day page of that same year…and when you think that Skeezix is now a great grandfather himself and has literally aged day by day…that was a unique tour de force. One of the other elements is the one to one relationship of the comic strips; you're holding the characters in your own hands…you're looking at it alone, it's for you, and so there's a very intense individual relationship. You see it in the intensity of comic fans. You know, it's almost a part of our being. Another part of the book was to establish the thesis that the comics are like the proletarian novels of today; they reflect our culture. They influence our life, customs, morals — and in return are influenced by it, and so there's an ongoing interrelationship between the comics and society.

STEVE: *Do you think that to some extent television has usurped that function?*

JERRY: Well, I don't know if it has usurped that function, but it has utilized those same attributes in different ways. It's a different medium. Each one has it's own uniqueness and its own powers and limitations. We can't do what television does, nor can television do what graphics do.

lucrative. Once in a while I'll do a job."

JOSEPH CAIN WAS AN ORDINARY, HARDWORKING, HONEST CITIZEN WHO NEVER DREAMED MAY 14TH, HERE, HOOLP BE DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER DAY IN HIS LIFE/ LIKE A MILLION OTHER ANONYMOUS NEW YORKERS, HIS LIFE WAS REGULATED BY THE HANDS OF A CLOCK/ AS USUAL, THIS DAY STARTED WITH THE DEEP, GRATTERING CLATTER OF AN ALARM CLOCK...
KRRR
RRRRRRRR
BY THE CLOCK HE RAN-SO PRESSED, ATE BREAK-FAST AND KISSED HIS WIFE GOODBYE...
"BYE...SO, I DON'T FORGET TO PICK UP THE CARS FOR SUPPER TONIGHT/"
I WON'T, DEAR / IT'S 7:48...I BETTER HURRY / CAN'T BE LATE AT THE OFFICE/ BYE, CLARA /
Terry Gilliam

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Television has a greater sense of reality, after all, than the comics. Although in the comics you never lose sight of the fantasy, you can lose yourself, you know, in your fantasy. I think in that sense, comics have more power, than television in that the reader plays a greater part. It engages their imagination. I don't think there's much of an intellectual exercise in watching a TV soap opera. The soaps do have some of the same appeal, however...a strong story interest, and character development, but I think of a different sort.

STEVE: *Considering what you said earlier about comics being cyclical; you were talking about the science fiction vogue in the fifties. Now it seems as though the adventure strip has died off and everything is pretty much humor-oriented. How do you fell about newspaper strips now?*

JERRY: Well, through the whole history of the comic strip from 1895 to the present, it has been cyclical, in waves of the same (the phone rings as it did intermittently during our conversation, necessitating a break in the taping).

STEVE: *Anyway, you were saying that through the whole history it was cyclical...*

JERRY: Yeah, almost all the major themes of strips have been cyclical — humor strips, kid strips, science fiction, sports, crime, even a type of soap opera strip. Even styles: super-realism, fantasy and so forth. Newspaper strips have been tied to the economy of newspapers and its technology, they are meant to sell newspapers. So the decline of the adventure strip was accelerated by other things, but mostly by the lack of space in the newspapers, I think the cutting down of space was disastrous for the adventure strip. There were economic reasons for doing that, and the artists and the syndicates have been fighting it, but its been a losing battle for the most part. On the one hand syndicates have been kind of ambivalent about it, too, because if the strips are larger, it means you can self fewer strips. Syndicates are in the business to sell strips. Newspapers are not adding space to accomodate more strips. Except for the recent innovation of **Gary Trudeau**...he demanded that DOONESBURY run at a certain size or he wouldn't sell it to them. That took great courage and principle.

STEVE: *Yeah. How many people have that much clout?*

JERRY: Yeah, well exactly...but it's a catch-22 situation. You could have the same size newspaper page and let's say, theoretically, instead of five former sized comic strips, you now have ten smaller strips. But if you keep the original size, which would be great for the strips and those artists, you're only selling five strips in that space because newspapers will not add another page of five strips. So you'd wind up, industry wide, with half the number of viable strips.

STEVE: *Do you think that to some extent the syndicates are cutting their own throats, economically, by not changing with the times as much?*

JERRY: Well, not so much the syndicates...I think it hasn't helped the syndicates, just as it hasn't helped the profession, but I think in the last analysis, it has hurt the newspapers the most. They have their own economic reasons for it, which you can argue with. They're the only ones who can rectify it. But the editorial budget is one of the few things that they have absolute control over, particularly the syndicate material they buy. They can't control the cost of newsprint. It's out of their hands what they pay photographers, lithographers and all the editorial staff, they're unionized for the most part — the distribution system -- trucks and drivers, the real estate taxes, all of the other elements are usually beyond their control or very narrowly limited — except for the feature material that they're buying.

They reduce the size of strips in order to keep more of the features. The newsprint and cost of space is so much, they're not going to add another page for the strips or other feature material. But in the long run, it is self-defeating because the comics are the one feature that are uni-

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"Too often, comics are the stepchildren."

que to the newspapers and where a lot of their circulation was born and where a lot of the readership still exists. Generations of kids are growing up, their reading habits are formed early. They're reading comic books and become comic book readers or television addicts — not reading newspapers and becoming the adult readers of tomorrow.

On the other hand, there are areas of hope and of change. . .I recently served on a committee called Twentieth Century Comics, funded by newspapers, syndicates, and cartoonists. We met over the past couple of years trying to visualize what the comics in the next century were going to look like, what directions newspapers have to go, how to better use the comics, how to better design the comics pages and attract advertising revenue, expanding the comic sections giving us more space. The study is meant to stimulate editors to take a closer interest in the comic product. Too often, they are the stepchildren — put in the back of the paper, run so many on the page, and that's it. It was an elaborate study. In fact, we printed up sample color comic sections to show how they could be redesigned.

There has been a lot of interest on the part of the newspapers, and so there might be, if some of the conclusions are put into practice, a renaissance in the newspaper comics, which would be fantastic. It would give increased space, more concern, better color, better design, which would attract a whole new generation, I think, of artists — and readers — to the comics.

STEVE: *Well, aren't a lot of the newspaper strips these days printed on plastic plates?*

JERRY: Yes, that's true, but I don't think that's been a. . .You're suggesting that that's seen as part of the problem?

STEVE: *Well, yes, as far as the comics not looking as sharp visually. The colors now are just anemic compared to some of the old Sunday sections from the Thirties and Forties.*

JERRY: Well, that's true. A lot of the color by the big presses are done by computer and they're not hand-colored and you just can't get the same effects. . .that's true, but I think that's not the major problem. I mean those things can be overcome too. If they become more concerned about the color, they'll be more concerned about the printing. That's part of the recommendations. The printing, the paper and the reproduction has to be upgraded to attract more important national advertisers, as well. They want to see their ads in a good light. When an art director designs a smart ad he's not anxious to place it in the comic sections as they are today. Anyway, to answer the question about the future of comics — it's up in the air.

STEVE: *Realistically, do you foresee any kind of future for newspaper strips for say, the next twenty years?*

JERRY: If some of these things are put into effect, I do. If not, if it continues to slide the way it's going now, I don't see that much. Certainly not for an adventure strip. And the kinds of humor strips have been altered radically, too. Ones that are successful are ones that have been able to adapt to a particular format — quick, visual. And those that are good at it are terrific, but it's only that particular kind of humor that will make it in that space. Something like HAGAR, **Dik Browne** designed just for this new image, and it's terrific. But I don't think you could do a "literary" strip today like LIL' ABNER or . . .POGO died because of that, and I think that's what **Trudeau** fears. Gary is concerned because he depends upon a fair amount of dialogue and he needs space for it to be read as well as for the visual. But, a lot of it is tied to the economy. If we've got a booming economy, newspapers might put some money into these ideas, it's not irretrievable. It could happen.

STEVE: *But what about styles of humor? How do you perceive the new styles of off-the-wall humor, things like Gary Larson's THE FAR SIDE and Berke Breathed's BLOOM COUNTY?*

JERRY: I think that's great. For years, there wasn't much innovation in styles of humor. . .It couldn't have gone ten, twenty years ago. It would've been. . .

STEVE: *Too weird?*

JERRY: Yeah, right. I detect some more flexibility recently, however. **Bill Griffith**'s ZIPPY, for example, may not achieve a large list, but a major syndicate like King distributing it is an interesting and welcome development. I think **John McMeel** and Universal Press Syndicate have been the most innovative and progressive in recent years, having paved the way with DOONESBURY and THE FAR SIDE, and even with FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, CALVIN & HOBBES, and CATHY, to name some that are more conventional but still with a very personal vision. Newspapers — and syndicates — were too rigid in what they would run. They underestimated their readership. They were too conservative. They didn't appeal to the younger generation of readers. The features reflected life, but they weren't avant garde enough. That's

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"I don't think you could do LIL' ABNER today."

been the one pitfall of the comics and syndication. In earlier days it was much more experimental. When I went back to study the early days and looked through years and years of strips, 1900 on up, on microfilm and original work, there was an *amazing* diversity of work! Amazing the experimentation compared to today.

STEVE: *Something like KRAZY KAT is still weird, by anybody's lights. It's totally unique. Of course, KRAZY KAT was too intellectual for a mass audience; Hearst looked at it and kept it — even raising Herriman's salary — that kind of faith is needed today.*

JERRY: Yeah, that's right. When the syndicates became big business, that kind of decision changed — now it's rarely made. With the experience of my own little syndicate, I know some of what's involved. Syndicates invest considerable sums just to launch a property. Then it has to get a list of subscribers in order to make it commercially attractive — for the artist as well — to sustain the high cost of salesmen on the road, promotion, etc. Whereas in the old days it was relatively simple. The artist was usually working on the staff for a paper, and when he got a new idea for a strip, the Editor would say: Let's try it this Sunday. Some of those early creators had two, three, four strips running at one time. If they found that one was more successful, or if they particularly liked one, they'd concentrate on that. It is ironic, however, that when one feature became successful, the artist often did it for the rest of his life — for economic reasons. It's hard to turn down thousands of dollars a week. But really, their days of creativity were over. George McManus was a prime example. He did a number of strips before BRINGING UP FATHER became a hit. He devoted the rest of his life to endless variations of Maggie & Jiggs theme. He could've created any number of other memorable characters.

STEVE: *Do you think the later strips got pretty stale?*

JERRY: Well, it almost has to be over a period of time. The essence of a strip is to keep it the same, the same theme — and yet change and grow, as the readership changes and grows. That's the problem. And only a few have been able to do that. But after a strip runs twenty years, thirty years, it has a longetivity because it already has a built-in readership. It may be dying, but it can last another ten years on the strength of its readership.

STEVE: *Well, what about something like PEANUTS, which has been around since the early Fifties?*

Jerry's backstage sketch of dancer/actress Ann Miller, who co-starred with Mickey Rooney in "Sugar Babies."

"Fellini started his career as a cartoonist."

JERRY: It started in 1950. Well, there's one where the creator kept it fresh. It's a theme that's flexible. The material that he uses is timeless, it reflects ongoing interests of readers of all ages. And he's also introduced a continuing flow of marvelous characters over the years. He's got a whole repertory company that he can orchestrate. And Schultz is an exceptional talent. Even if you have an exceptional talent, you've got to hit on the right format for the combination to work.

STEVE: *Since the 1960s when there've been the comics show at the Louvre that you mentioned earlier and the show that you curated, do you think there's been a greater acceptance of comics as art among the fine art establishment?*

JERRY: Well, I think so, but it's been an uphill battle. Comics have always been looked down on with a certain kind of snobbery, even among other professionals. The illustrators look down on the cartoonists. I belonged to the Illustrators Society for many years because of the books I illustrated, but they would blackball some top cartoonists from joining because they were just mere cartoonists. I think **Walt Kelly** was one, if you can imagine that. . . We made some inroads with the Graham Galley Shows and the Kennedy Center show. I was also a consultant for the show at the Whitney.

STEVE: *Oh, yeah, I was going to ask you if you had anything to do with that. Did you select some of the pieces?*

JERRY: Yes, and I wrote an article for the catalog and advised the curators for the show.

STEVE: *I was working for THE COMICS JOURNAL, who put together the catalog for that, at the time.*

JERRY: So there have been some inroads, but there have been only a few, relatively, that have achieved some kind of a status in the fine art field — **Herriman, James Thurber, Al Hirschfeld, David Levine, Saul Steinberg, George Grosz** and even **Ben Shahn, much of whose graphics I'd defined as cartoons.**

STEVE: *Feiffer maybe?*

JERRY: **Feiffer** to a degree. *(This interview was recorded of course before Feiffer won his Pulitzer Prize.)* He has not been as appreciated yet, as he should be, as the others. Foster, also, to a degree, but more among cartoon aficionados.

STEVE: *Do you think Foster is well respected?*

JERRY: I think so. I think **Herriman** more than **Foster**, however, among the fine art critics.

STEVE: *Why does it always seem to be the case that a humor artist is more respected than a Milton Caniff or an Alex Raymond?*

JERRY: Well, I think it stems more from snobbery really by art critics — even towards illustrators as well as cartoonists. Many fine artists themselves don't appreciate the illustrators. I think it's breaking down somewhat lately. I mean a few critics have begun to appreciate illustration and cartooning. The fine art establishment has always had a bias about anything that was that popular; it couldn't be art. And anything that's funny is too frivilous to be real art. I knew **Gilbert Seldes** in his later days. I don't know if that name means anything to you, but he wrote a classic book, THE SEVEN LIVELY ARTS. He was the first important critic who treated comic art as an art form. But even then he showed a snobbery about the art. He cited **Herriman** and just one or two others that were worthy of consideration. He appreciated, however, the potential of the genre and the genius to produce a work of art like KRAZY KAT. That was the first opening, and we haven't progressed too far beyond that. I think if we had gotten that Met show, it would have made a profound difference. It would take something dramatic. The Whitney show made a little bit of a ripple, but it was at their downtown gallery and wasn't a major production. The art is certainly far more appreciated in Europe, being exhibited at the Louvre and supported by some of the more serious art critics. I've spoken to **Alain Renais** about the comics. . .

STEVE: *The film director?*

JERRY: Yes. He's a great comics fan — as was the late **Andre Malraux.** I never talked to him but I know he was one of the group of French writers, artists and intellectuals who wrote about and appreciated the uniqueness of the art.

STEVE: *Fellini?*

JERRY: **Fellini** also, he started his career as a cartoonist, as you know. I talked to some of the French and Italian critics like

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"Newspapers were too conservative."

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"This is my twenty-third year of doing a daily political cartoon."

Francis Lacassin who writes very seriously on the comics and teaches at the Sorbonne.

STEVE: *How do you account for the divergence in attitude between the European critics and the American critics? Are they more perceptive?*

JERRY: Well, in many ways they are. And they were less hide-bound by our conventions. I think some of the inroads we made were because the French have taken it up...It's not unique, we used to think about jazz the same way until the French took it up and said: "Hey, what is this? Jazz is great!" Good music is art. And its the same with our own folk art, we're usually the last ones to appreciate our own indigeneous art.

STEVE: *That's true. A lot of jazz artists...*

JERRY: Go over there first and come back with a French imprimatur to impress the critics.

STEVE: *Well, they have to go over there to make a living. I mean, you could starve to death playing jazz in America.*

JERRY: And then they get a reputation...

STEVE: *Are there any large shows of comic art in the states on the horizon that you know about?*

JERRY: Not at the moment. Well, I was involved in one, but not in general art. I put together a show of editorial cartoons, originals, at the Overseas Press Club and will later open at the National Press Club in Washington. I'm on the advisory board of the Cartoon Museum. Do you know about the Cartoon Museum?

STEVE: *Oh yeah, out there in Portchester.*

JERRY: Well, we have continuing shows there that are excellent...on everyone from **Nast** to **Disney** — professionally produced by **Brian Walker, Mort Walker's** son. **Chuck Green** is the museum curator.

STEVE: *Were you associated at all with the Smithsonian collection of newspaper comics?*

JERRY: No.

STEVE: *Well, speaking of editorial cartoons, we didn't really touch on that aspect of your career. How about if we talk a little bit about that?*

JERRY: As a matter of fact, that was something, I guess, that was one of my early goals, something that I really wanted to do for many years before I really got into it. I've always been interested in political affairs. That was always my favorite reading...I guess my early training as a journalist led me to that. I remember by folks worked for political candidates when I was a kid and I guess I absorbed some of that. I always wanted to do a political strip or political satire. This year is my twenty-third year of doing a daily political cartoon. I can't believe it!

STEVE: *For which syndicate?*

JERRY: Well, first I was with the Chicago Tribune/New York News Syndicate, for fifteen, sixteen years, and then I left it to found the Cartoonists & Writers Syndicate, and I've been syndicated through C & W since then.

STEVE: *So, you're basically working for yourself?*

JERRY: Yes, in effect, which was something I'd wanted to do for a long time. But, you know, starting a syndicate is difficult and I didn't know if I wanted to get so involved in the business end of it. What I did see was the opportunity to accomplish something...and the challenge of trying something new — which I can rarely resist. It bears something on some of the things we've been talking about — what the potential is for newspaper features — particularly with today's economics. I wanted to test my idea that a small syndicate, with low

GENERAL, WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE MISSILES?
THE DIRECTION THEY'RE POINTED, SENATOR...
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"I would sometimes get 1500 letters a week."

overhead, can devote itself to a select group of features of focused interest — perhaps not viable for a large syndicate — and develop, promote and syndicate them to a viable list of newspapers.

To sum up, that's why I finally decided to start the Cartoonist's & Writer's Syndicate. I thought there was a place for a syndicate that would take a chance on talent that couldn't ordinarily get accepted by the major syndicates for one reason or another. They might feel the material would not have a wide enough audience. Then again, a small efficiently run syndicate would not need near the list of subscribers for a feature that a large syndicate required to be viable. I also enjoyed the personal contact with newspaper editors throughout the country and abroad. I find the feedback invaluable. An artist working for a syndicate rarely gets a chance to discuss his feature with his subscribing editors. There were features I thought we could develop among artists and writers that the majors might not see the potential in. When I had the chance to work with artists individually, as I did in the old days at SVA, for four hours a night, five nights a week, a number of talented students developed into top professionals. I wanted to try that with a syndicate and perhaps develop features that wouldn't see the light of day otherwise. That was my initial premise. It didn't work exactly like that, but it's still the potential of the syndicate.

Doing a daily political cartoon, LIFE WITH ROBINSON, and a Sunday page of my own, running the syndicate and continuing to do some books, didn't permit the time to launch more than three other features so far. One didn't make it, but the other two are running very successfully. The one book, incidentally, THE COMICS: **An Illustrated History of Comic Strip Art** (G.P. Putnam), took three years, which hardly left time for the important things, like tennis!

STEVE: *What are your other interests?*

JERRY: Well, aside from tennis, I was very interested in photography and I nearly went into it professionally at one time. The SVA Gallery held a show of my color photography. I like to paint, and I'm working on a film that I've mostly shot and haven't finished editing.

STEVE: *What sort of film is it?*

JERRY: Well, it's a story that I wrote and filmed at Cape Cod one summer. Live action. And I'm currently collaborating on an exciting project . . . the book and lyrics for a musical. So I didn't devote as much time to the syndicate until recently.

STEVE: *What features did your syndicate develop?*

JERRY: Well, two years ago we launched, for the first time, another feature in addition to my own, by another artist, a former student of mine at SVA, **John Langton.** We thought "Think You Know?" was a clever panel but it didn't go. It ran about eight months in '84. It proved to be premature. The timing was bad. The economy was terrible that year . . . all the syndicates had difficulties. I think we could have gotten it off to a viable list at a better time. We signed 25 papers or so — not enough for it to continue. It was a panel based on the tremendous interest in trivia, in sports, TV and film, and excellently illustrated by John, a fine cartoonist. John is the Art Director for the NEW YORK POST and was my assistant for a number of years after graduating from SVA.

STEVE: *That sounds like something that would have gone over very well.*

JERRY: Perhaps if we had launched it a year later.

STEVE: *Well, TRIVIAL PURSUIT is such a popular game . . .*

JERRY: Exactly. We would've been in the forefront. So timing, just as in the science fiction strip, is very important, but you never really know. You can't predict with precision. Sometimes you can tell when *not* to launch something, and sometimes you can tell what format to release it in and other technical things, but it's not an exact science, any more than when to open a Broadway show.

STEVE: *What came next?*

JERRY: I had planned to syndicate FLUBS & FLUFFS. I had done it about fifteen years for the NEW YORK SUNDAY NEWS. Three collections were published which went very well. Then I stopped it for about three or four years. And then out of the blue THE NEWS made me a terrific offer to resume it and I agreed. It is a very popular feature. I would sometimes get 1500 letters a week.

STEVE: *Good grief!*

JERRY: They said I was getting as much mail as the President of the United States! It is a feature based on reader participation. They send in actual flubs. Such as "Socrates died of an overdose of wedlock." or " An ignoramus is a pre-hysterical animal." or "Many consider our number one problem to be jubilant delinquency." Then I would illustrate them, adding dialogue. They were fun to visualize. Some I couldn't use in a family newspaper, such as, **"Magellan** circumsised the world three times!" Parents send them in, teachers, and the kids themselves, often with marvelous illustrations of their own. I have a backlog of

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"I have 25,000 unopened letters . . ."

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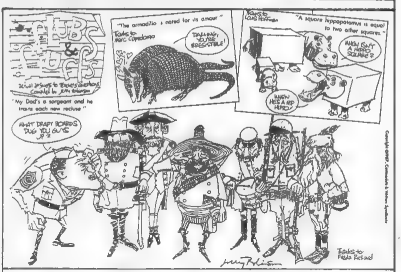
twenty five thousand unopened letters if you ever want to open some mail for me. (Laughs) It was fun to do and it gave me a great change of pace once a week from the political cartoon. But also I thought: this time I'm going to syndicate it and add a daily panel. Until then it was drawn exclusively for THE DAILY NEWS. But I set it aside, because I decided to go with an idea that evolved from another book I did in 1980 -- THE 70s: THE BEST POLITICAL CARTOONS OF THE DECADE, published by McGraw - Hill. It was a history of the Seventies, year by year.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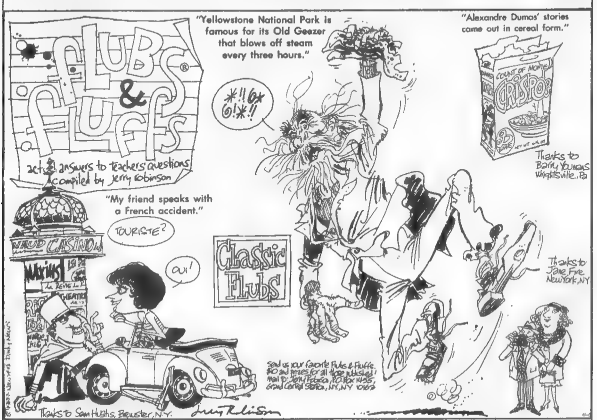
MATH HERE & ME HERE!
"My Dad's a sergeant and he trains each new recruit."
FIGHT DRAFT BOARDS! DUG IN, CATS!
Jerry Robinson
Thanks to Peter Poland

STEVE: *How did the feature develop?*

JERRY: Well, I knew a lot of the leading cartoonists around the world from the time I was president of the AEC and NCS, and various trips abroad for the State Department, and through them I contacted others. Anyway, I wound up with some two hundred and fifty artists represented in the book. One hundred and twenty five from around the world and the rest American, The book did very well and is still in print. It struck me that many of the reviewers said almost the same thing, to wit: "It was very interesting to see the cartoonist's opinion from abroad. . .they are some of the best graphic artists, as well as being influential cartoonists. . .and it was too bad we only get to see them in an anthology like this." That planted the bug in my head, about all I need to get obsessive about an idea. Well, it took about two years for our editor, **Steve Flanagan**, and myself to put together the package. Steve, by the way, is also a former student from my class at the New School — and is an accomplished painter as well as cartoonist. Anyway, in June 1984 we launched VIEWS OF THE WORLD. We now have contracts with over eighty of the world's best editorial cartoonists on the most influential journals in over forty countries. We even have a contract with the Soviet Union, and cartoonists in Nicaragua, and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Eastern bloc countries as well as in all the major western European countries, South and Central America, Asia, Africa, and Australia. Every week we put together a round-up of world opinion that we syndicate to American newspapers and abroad.

STEVE: *On the editorial page?*

JERRY: Or op-ed pages, Week in Review sections, etc.

STEVE: *I've seen that feature. I like that.*

JERRY: It's very exciting to do.

STEVE: *Did you and your son work on that together?*

JERRY: Yes. Jens was Associate Editor, and worked closely with Steve. We all work on everything, but they devoted themselves a great deal to that feature. But we are all involved in the promotion, sales, editorial — everything. The engraving, printing and mailing is done at a plant in New Jersey and we just do the editorial work here in my studio. Jens took leave last year to do graduate work in International Relations at the London School of Economics. He handled syndicate affairs for us there at the same time, as we now have subscribers throughout Europe such as the INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE in Paris, THE GUARDIAN and THE INDEPENDENT in London, AFTONPOSTON in Oslo and others. He returned this year to enter law school at Northwestern University. He'll have at least one client when he graduates — C & W Syndicate! VIEWS OF THE WORLD subscribers now include over 100 of the leading newspapers in the United States, including the LOS ANGELES TIMES, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH, CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER, PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER, ATLANTA CONSTITUTION, WASHINGTON POST, MIAMI HERALD, DALLAS MORNING NEWS, HOUSTON CHRONICLE, HARTFORD COURANT, and most of the leading papers in Canada.

STEVE: *Describe how the feature works.*

JERRY: We feel it is a real contribution to news coverage. It does just what the reviewers of the book had suggested. We show the world diversity of opinion. The time was right. Americans are more concerned about world issues . . . about what other countries think about the issues that affect our lives — arms control, foreign policy, as well as our domestic issues. The graphics are exciting — in great measure different than our own editorial cartoonists. It's fascinating — and important for us to see what they are reading in THE ECONOMIST in London or in L'EXPRESS in Paris about U.S. involvement in Nicaragua, or how the issue of apartheid is reported in the FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE in Germany, MARRIV in Israel, EXCELSIOR in Mexico or even THE STAR in South Africa, etc.

STEVE: *It's like tapping into the political current of a particular country at a specific moment.*

JERRY: Exactly. It has proved to be an excellent resource for editors. We've also launched a companion feature, a spin-off — VIEWS OF THE WORLD: CARICATURES. It's a semi-monthly portfolio of world leaders in the news. Some of these same cartoonists are brilliant caricaturists. About ten of them participate. Most of the leading VIEWS OF THE WORLD papers also subscribe to this service . . . Those are some of the things we are involved in now with the syndicate.

STEVE: *Do you see the comics as a sort of international language?*

JERRY: Yes, it certainly is. I don't think there's anything else that can show world issues and the various points of view from such disparate societies and languages better than with the art of the political cartoon. □

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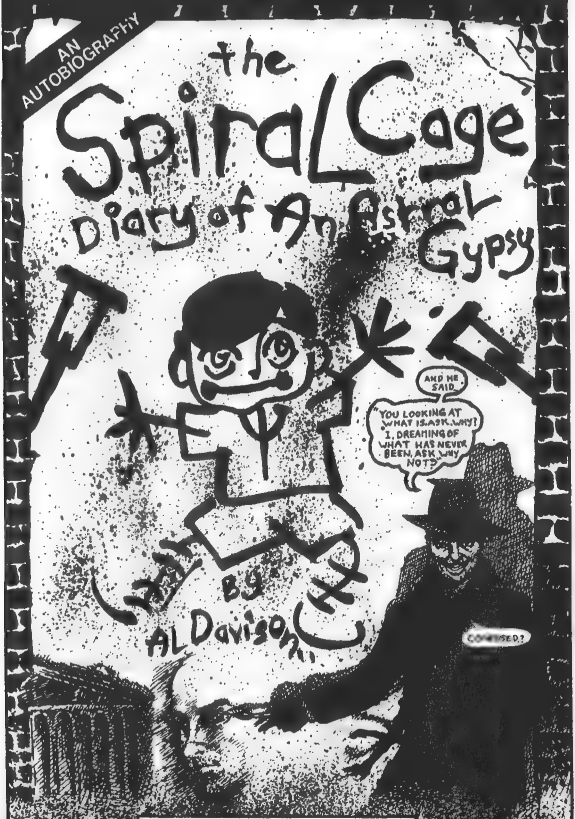

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY
the Spiral Cage
Diary of An Astral Gypsy
AND HE SAID...
"YOU LOOKING AT WHAT IS ASK WHY? I, DREAMING OF WHAT HAS NEVER BEEN, ASK WHY NOT?
CONFUSED?
By AL Davison

AUG.98 FROM RENEGADE PRESS

"It was the quickest way to make money."

KEN LOPEZ

Ken's lettering appears in almost all of Marvel's comics — through his name appears only on the handful of books he letters in the entirety. Lopez is a production letterer — one of the select members of the production staff, whose job it is to do all the lettering corrections that editors request. Thus Ken must be able to mimic the styles of such letterers as Tom Orzechowski, Janice Chiang, Rick Parker and many another. That's quite a challenge. But Ken's quite a guy. He loves his lettering — you could even say Lopez is a man of letters . . .

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *I am talking with Ken Lopez, production letterer at Marvel Comics.*

KEN LOPEZ: What do you want to know?

DWIGHT: *What do I want to know? Well —*

KEN: Why are we doing this?

DWIGHT: *I want to —*

KEN: I don't think I've made that much of an impact on comics to warrant something like this.

DWIGHT: *Well, I agree, but then we're not putting you on the cover.*

KEN: You're not? Well, this intereview's over then. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Why are you lettering instead of something else?*

KEN: Why am I lettering? It was the quickest way to make money.

DWIGHT: *Did you study to be a letterer specifically or —*

KEN: No.

DWIGHT: *— fall into it or what?*

KEN: I studied to be an illustrator, and I felt making money doing illustration was another year away, whereas making money lettering was only a month away, when I got out of school. Plus I took logo design at school, so that was something that I wanted to try my hand at here.

DWIGHT: *Was Marvel the first place that you approached?*

KEN: Yeah, pretty much, 'cause it's the first place I ever worked at. I started as a high school intern when I was about 15 years old, getting school credits, so I pretty much had my foot in the door already, and walked into a job once I got out of school.

DWIGHT: *Whose lettering have you studied?*

KEN: **Jim Novak** mostly. I think he's the best, despite what he says.

DWIGHT: *What letter shape do you like most to draw?*

KEN: The "E."

DWIGHT: *Why?*

KEN: 'Cause it's the easiest.

DWIGHT: *What's the hardest?*

KEN: The "S."

DWIGHT: *Why?*

KEN: 'Cause it's the hardest one to letter consistently fast, for most of us beginners. People like **Novak** and **Orzechowski** have got it down, it's easy for them to do. That's always been my trouble letter.

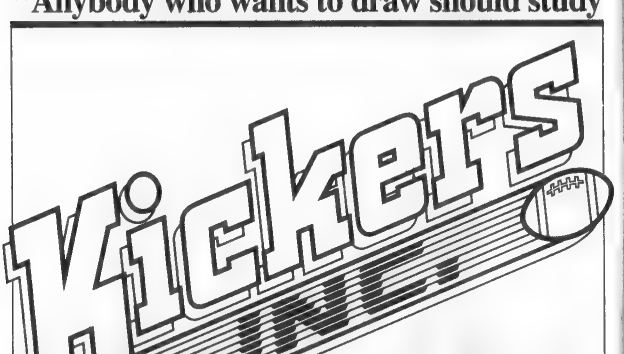
DWIGHT: *Well, what's the fastest you've ever lettered a page?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Kenneth Lopez
Born: 4 September 1963 — Marshalcolt
Residence: Manhattan, same area as Spider-Man
Favorite Color: Blue
Favorite Pen Point: Hunt #107
Favorite Music When Working Hard: Boston, Van Halen, those are good churn-out-the-work bands
Most Interesting Incident While Riding the Subway: I'm just sitting there and I hear a knock and I look, one of my friends pulling a moon.

KEN LOPEZ

"Anybody who wants to draw should study



KEN: I've gone from 45 minutes to an hour, depending on the amount of copy on it.

DWIGHT: *What's the thing that drives you nuts when you're lettering?*

KEN: Heavy copy. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Which writer's work do you most enjoy lettering?*

KEN: I haven't lettered that many different writers yet, but I have to say **Gruenwald** on CAPTAIN AMERICA.

DWIGHT: *What do you do when you're not lettering?*

KEN: Sleep.

DWIGHT: *Sleep? You live to letter, you letter to live?*

KEN: At the moment, I'm doing a lot of work. I'm trying to pace myself out, but when I'm not lettering I'll be drawing, going out to party, things like that. Standard 23-year-old kind of stuff.

DWIGHT: *Have you gone to conventions or things like that yet?*

KEN: No. I stay away from those things.

DWIGHT: *Being a professional letterer, do you find yourself looking at magazines and other comics and examining them?*

KEN: Yeah, I do. I start picking apart little things. I'll say, "Oh, man, this guy does this wrong, this guy does that wrong, maybe he should space it better or whatever."

DWIGHT: *If you had "it" to do any lettering over again, which one would you do, or redo?*

KEN: A book that I've done? *(Contemplative pause.)* Probably the first one. I did the WONDER MAN special a couple of years ago, that was my first lettering job, and I was never happy with that. Now that I'm a little bit more experienced, I'd love to go back and do that one again, have it look the way I feel it should look.

DWIGHT: *Which book would you love to letter?*

KEN: Hm, that's a tough one. Anything that **John Buscema** draws, once I get a little better. I had AVENGERS offered to me at one point and I didn't want to do it, because I didn't feel I was up to par with the other creators on the book.

DWIGHT: *What's been the biggest thing you've learned being here?*

KEN: You do your work and you meet the deadlines and you try and keep the quality level up at the same time. That's pretty much stuff I knew anyway.

DWIGHT: *Does your family understand what you do? Lettering is, after all, a rather esoteric job description.*

KEN: Yeah. Yeah, they understand what I do. They know it pays the bills pretty well.

DWIGHT: *If you had a chance to tell fans anything, what would you tell them, since you're an insider now?*

KEN: I'd say go to school, and don't just study comic books. Somebody who wants to work here should know the fundamentals of everything, be it a letterer, an artist, a logo designer. They should know what's going on outside of comics. You know, I see a lot of comic artists today learning to draw *from* the comics, but they don't know anything about the fundamentals — they don't know how to draw real anatomy or anything like that — and that's wrong, 'cause all they're drawing is someone else's interpretation. They might be taking shortcuts, because they understand what's going on. The next person down is taking their shortcuts, but not knowing what's going on. Anybody who wants to draw should study **Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci** and see how they draw. Those are the people to study from. Those are the people **Wrightsons** and **Buscemas** study from. And the same

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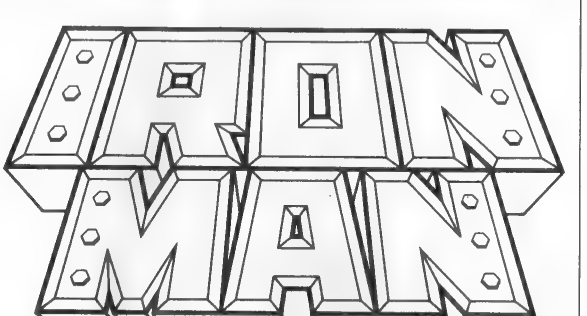
Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci."



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holds true for people trying to do logo designs, you know. The business is a little different now, they want to see more contemporary stuff, but the things coming out of DC, and Marvel's starting to do that now too . . . I don't know if I should say this this way — *(Laughter)* but like the design on logos is getting more contemporary and trying to steer away from the old comic-book look, and the only way to do that is to look at what's going on in advertising, and things like that, to see what logos are working out there, and trying to apply it here. So, go to school.

DWIGHT: *In talking about logos, what are the criteria that you work under?*

KEN: Readability. How contemporary it looks. You want it to have, you know, a modern feel. You also want to have a feel that you know it's going to look good ten years from now. Certain logos have lasted years. SUPERMAN has stayed SUPERMAN over the years, it's a nice timeless logo. Pretty much ACTION COMICS have been the same way, too, up until recently — it kind of modified a bit — but it's always pretty much been the same, and it still looks good.

DWIGHT: *AMAZING SPIDER-MAN?*

KEN: AMAZING SPIDER-MAN still looks great today. It's the only logo ever on that book, and it still looks good.

DWIGHT: *Which ones for you stand out, when you're walking up to a comic-book rack at Forbidden Planet, for instance — which logos do you notice first?(Enter Walt Simonson.)*

DWIGHT: *Hi, Walter.*

WALT SIMONSON: Here's your pen, thank you very much. I'm really sorry, I put it in my pocket and just walked off. I'm sure you missed it dreadfully.

KEN: Didn't even notice it.

WALT: Thank you very much.

KEN: It's alright, Walt.*(Exit Walt Simonson.)*

KEN: Oh, which ones do I notice — besides my own, right?

DWIGHT: *Well, tell us which ones you did.*

KEN: I did CLASSIC X-MEN. I did STAR BRAND; PSI-FORCE; NIGHTMASK — excuse me. *(Takes phone call.) Where was I?*

DWIGHT: *Listing off your logo names.*

KEN: I did the COMET MAN logo; the new KICKERS logo; the new IRON MAN logo. I'm sure there's others I can't remember. I also design the GIANT-SIZED ANNUAL logo strip for this year.

Going back to the question you asked before, which logo really stands out, man, I love that new SHADOW logo that DC has. That's such a perfect blend of the old time, with a good contemporary feel. That's one of the nicer logos I've seen.

DWIGHT: *For me the one logo that stood out negatively was LASER ERASER AND PRESSBUTTON. I would look at it and it didn't say anything, it was just this weird splash of color. It just amazes me how much variety of letter shapes, styles, splashes of color that can actually go into a logo, and how often some logos get changed.*

KEN: Like IRON MAN, it's gone through it's changes.

DWIGHT: *Five years from now what do you see Ken Lopez doing?*

KEN: Probably being a commercial illustrator and working on my own.

DWIGHT: *In comics?*

KEN: Advertising, book publishing, things like that. Yeah, maybe a little comic-book stuff here and there. Hey, I've been here awhile, it might be a little hard cutting the ties. And I like it, too, so I might still want to do an occasional thing here, if everything goes well. It could always end up with disaster. *(Laughter.)*

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LAST WORD

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BYRNED? YOU BET!

Dear DAK,

We just read a copy of "THE STAR BRAND" #13. We were disgusted and revolted. **JOHN BYRNE** gave the character of Debbie Fixx a needlessly brutal and pointless death at the hand of her to-be-born child.

The as-yet unnamed boy burst from her womb like the monster from "ALIEN". The lack of any blood or fluid simply added to the grotesque quality of the scene. In fact, it hammers home the utter irrelevance of her death that we see nothing of Debbie Fixx again. No part of her was shown in the panel following the "birth" scene as the infant rises under its own power. She is buried off-panel, so the next thing we see is her grave. The death of this supporting character is given no respect whatsoever. **Byrne** even spits on her grave by having the child return in spirit long enough to explain that it was acquiring sentience while in utero and that it consumed ("absorbed") the consciousness of its mother. This means that, as an intelligent creature, it had to have chosen to burst through its mother's womb. It must also have known it would kill her. Then it takes her departing soul and by "absorbing" it, commits a blatant act of cannibalism. This is premeditated, callous, thoughtless, murder. Both on the part of the child, and on the part of **John Byrne.**

Byrne has a history of mean-spirited use of **Jim Shooter**-characters, usually in parody. In DC's "Legends" mini-series, Guy Gardner fought a throw-away villain called "Sunspot". He ended up burning his own leg off. Didn't he look an awful lot like a brown-haired Ken Connel? When **Byrne** re-introduced a very nasty version of Mr. Mxyzpdlk into the Superman mythos,the first appeared as a mockery of the Beyonder named Ben De Roy. The difference was that Ben De Roy had the **Don Johnson** 3-day's growth. Like the Beyonder, he used his powers flagrantly and with little care. You know, the usual stuff: people's hands being burned off, a child's toy half-throttling him. Funny, all he does is cry that mean old Superman broke it. In true Mxyzpdlk fashion, all physical effects of his magic left with him, but **Byrne** took pains to point out the heavy psychological scars that remained.

To any comics buff both these bits are old news. We bring them up now to point out that both Beyonder and Star Brand are, in many ways, **Jim Shooter** himself translated into the main character of a comic book. The New Universe itself was a **Shooter** creation. It and all the titles that it supports, can be thought of as "personal to **Jim Shooter**".

When he took over, **Byrne** wasted no time commandeering the mysterious "White Event". It was implied that the Event was a catalyst for the sudden development of super-humans. Certainly, the D.P. 7 annual #1 bears this out, though the White Event wasn't mentioned by name. Now, it's a Star Brand event. The Star Brand is solely responsible for super-powers on Earth. **Byrne** was just as offensive as if he had stated that the two events (the White one and the genesis of super-heros) had happened at the same time — by coincidence.

The "Old Man" who gave Ken Connel his powers is suddenly a human who got the power a couple of hundred years ago. Why doesn't he rule the Earth? Out of immortal boredom, if nothing else? These changes strike directly at the heart of the New Universe and Star Brand in particular. Suddenly, at least one super-being has existed for some time. The White Event was just another of his suicide attempts.

Debbie Fixx wasn't even pregnant before **Byrne** came to Star Brand. #13 is only his third issue. Over this short span, no appreciable time has passed, yet we find Fixx to be 10 weeks pregnant at the end of the first issue, see Pittsburgh destroyed the second, and by the opening of the third issue, she's pumped up enough to be burst by her child. It happened so fast, it was as if **Byrne,** in his bloodlust, took no time for thought or for writing the slightest charade of buildup or foreshadow. In his zeal to warp the New Universe, to lash out directly against **Shooter's** creations, he has bludgeoned and outright contradicted anything that got in his path. This issue of THE STAR BRAND, as **Byrne** calls it, is not a comic book. It is a petty and vicious vendetta. A kicking of a man when he is down.

Don't get us wrong. We have no fondness for **Jim Shooter.** We were as angered and saddened by the news of Phoenix's execution order as most readers were. We loved Power Man/Iron Fist, but the very creation of the New Universe led directly to the death of Iron Fist. **Shooter,** for some reason, wouldn't put out more than a set number of books. So PM/IF was cut and its writer had a tantrum. With the death of Debbie Fixx, **John Byrne** has shown us his capacity to be like the man he hates. With the stroke of a pen he can warp an issue worse than the Beyonder, and he can butcher a woman with more callousness than the man who commanded the death of Jean Grey.

In comics, the powerful aren't supposed to be able to stomp on the powerless without meeting resistance. **John Byrne** is a hot commodity right now. He thinks he can do anything he wants. He thinks he can use his power to gain bitter revenge on the now-dethroned **Jim Shooter** by killing his comic book-girlfriend through her pregnancy with his child; and by twisting to the breaking point the foundations of his most encompassing creation, the New Universe. Like any other obsessed and world-destroying super-villain, he deserves to be stopped.

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